NO HOLDS BARRED # 9

FOREVER KNIGHT

MIAMI VICE

EROICA

WILD WILD WEST

RIPTIDE

UFO

MULTIMEDIA "/"

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TZ9

NO HOLDS BARRED

A Multi-Media "/" Zine

Issue No. NINE

WARNING: This fanzine contains same-sex, adult-oriented material. It will not knowingly be sold to anyone under the age of eighteen. Age Statement Required.

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EDITORIAL

I'm bringing three issues of "No Holds Barred" out almost simultaneously - what a record!

 # 7, which was originally my all-Science Fiction issue turned into an issue devoted to "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea". It contains three novellas. I had had several "Blake's 7" submissions on hand for it, all Blake/Avon, but when I decided to do "Fire and Ice" III, all those stories went there. The only other SF submission for that issue was Kitty Fisher's "Black and White"; I saved that for this issue. # 8 is all Holmes/Watson, with two novellas and several short stories.

Future issues: # 10, an all-PROFESSIONALS issue, is scheduled for publication October, 1995. I am still open to submissions. I'm also planning an all MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. issue. ***Deadline for all of the above: August 31, 1995.***

I haven't set a deadline for my next multimedia issue, but I already have several submissions "in progress". I would love to see some stories based on DEEP SPACE 9 and THE FUGITIVE. And more MIAMI VICE, SHERLOCK HOLMES, WISEGUY, and QUANTUM LEAP! I will, as always, consider "/" stories set in any universe.

Contributions may be submitted on IBM compatible programs, on 3½" or 5¼" diskettes. Please send hard copy as well.

Send SASE for price notification of future issues.

A KNIGHT'S TALE

BY TIGER TYGER

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade...
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

Alan Seeger,
I Have a Rendezvous With Death

Nicholas Knight laughed at one of Schanke's more outré jokes, and hung up the phone. It still amazed the blonde that he and his fellow detective had actually managed not only to create a partnership that worked, but also to eke out a friendship from the disparate beginning of their relationship. Ever-paranoid, the Polish detective now trusted his life with his partner, tolerating his physical differences as he did the other seeming peccadilloes that characterized the blonde, no longer questioning how Nick managed some of the busts he came in with. Schanke was loyal, trusting...and completely unsuspecting that his partner was anything other than he seemed. Not that Schanke would ever conceive on his own that his fellow detective was a seven hundred year old vampire with a yen to be human.

Natalie watched Nick's attention drift away on his own thoughts, never knowing whether he was in the present or living in his memory -- haunting the past. She sat curled on one of the easy chairs strewn about the loft, sipping wine, contemplating the mystery that sat before her.

At first glance, Nick seemed extraordinarily pale, his blue-gray eyes the only color. Natalie understood from Nick that he would appear somewhat flushed only after he fed. On human blood, that is. His blonde hair was cut short as he had always worn it, since centuries before when his life had been taken from him and this one put in it's place. He was a very handsome man, and had not aged past his thirty second year.

Sometime in the 1200's he had been changed; he never spoke of it, and had given her a look of such combined understanding of her curiosity and an almost tangible sense of unutterable loss that she never had the courage to ask again. She hadn't the heart to see it. Such pain was more than anyone, mortal or immortal, should ever bear.

Nicholas had the face of an angel, usually very sweet and boyish, a permanent Botticelli creation. She tried to forget the other side of him, the ruthless, hungry animal that could transform him from man to vampire in a heartbeat. The hot blue gaze was terrifying and mesmerizing at the same time, fangs gleaming in the reflected light that seemed to consciously avoid touching him. But it was the rough, grating yet velvet voice that frightened her most. If wolves could speak, his voice was what they would sound like, she was sure. Natalie sipped her drink a little faster.

"That's different." Nick's voice broke the stillness.

"What is?" she responded, shaking her head to clear it, not wanting to dwell on her thoughts.

"Usually I'm the one who wanders away in his thoughts, not you." He rose, very fluidly, almost as if he measured every step, careful of his footing, and taking her wine glass, went to the refrigerator to fill it, ignoring with long-standing patience the other bottles that graced the bleak white interior. One bottle showed its age, in the darkness of the glass, the antique gold that was laced about it. She didn't know when the last time was that bottle had been opened. It did not hold just blood, her scientist's mind told her with relentless clarity. Or not just human blood.

When stirred by pain or rage, when his frustrations ate away his humor with acid

nails, Natalie knew from experience that that particular bottle was where he would want to turn. She had always been there, she thought, to turn him aside at the last moment....

She smiled and accepted the glass, "Just pondering innies and outies." Nat waited for the question she knew would come.

Nick frowned and stared down at her. "Innies and outies?" His precise diction made it sound even funnier than it was.

"Bellybuttons," she replied, trying to sound very scientific and failing when she laughed at the expression on his gaunt face: humor, astonishment, and something that showed he did not always understand her.

"It's almost midnight," he said a few minutes later, a companionable silence one of the more pleasant things they shared.

Natalie wasn't surprised that Nick knew the time, almost to the minute. Being what he was, Nick was very time-conscious, able to tell just when dawn would break, feeling a lethargy steal over him, a lulling sensation that he fought as hard as he was able. Over the past years, he seemed to be handling the changes that his desire to be human imposed, though they were days when they both thought that it would never work. These thoughts were never spoken; it was just communicated with a brief glance and that would be enough. Then Nick would paste *that* smile on his lips which said more than any book could. He would endure.

Tonight was one of the good nights. Nick occasionally lapsed into depressions and incredible rages that nothing Natalie could say or do would penetrate. On nights like those, she had no choice but to leave him alone, alone with the pain that only he could understand. But tonight they had just closed a particularly nasty homicide that had stumped some of the best in the country and Nick was feeling hopeful. She could see that in the sparkle of his eyes. Schanke had decided to go home early and celebrate with Myra and while the Lieutenant was feeling expansive she told Nick to leave as well, and "catch up on the sleep you look like you've been missing."

Mozart played in the background, just the far-off trickle of his incredible interweaving melodies that was too faint for her to catch. Nick, of course, heard it very well, his superlative senses far outweighing hers or most other humans. She grinned. Nick was almost always aware when he did things that showed off his "supernatural" abilities, but tonight he must be so relaxed he had forgotten. A rare occasion.

* * * * *

Shadows fall
Through the darkness you reach
And the hunger calls.
Then you run
To the passion
that takes you over --

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

Nick stood by the windows and gazed out into the night he knew so well. As much as he was pleased with the closure of the infamous Eternity killer case, he knew no peace tonight. As Holmes would have said, there was something "afoot" this night...and he had no clue as to what it could be. He was still disturbed by the sudden reappearance of Lucien.

Or if you wanted to go further into history, Prince Aleksandr Romanov, or as he had called himself since Paris, LaCroix. Nick believed LaCroix's history went even further back than that, Lucien's knowledge of Roman and Greek history far more than he could have mastered in a library.

Older than Nicholas by perhaps three hundred years or more, his strength a glimmer in comparison, LaCroix frightened the hell out of Nicholas. If there was any hell left in him now, after so long trying to be human.

LaCroix had recently told him once more that he would never achieve his most ardent desire: to return to the ranks of humanity and die of old age. It was a day that Nicholas would never forget. The drug that Natalie had given him had become an addiction, a "fix," and LaCroix had been proven right once more when he had merely traded one addiction for another.

There were many tales told that such a dream could never be and LaCroix was their

most insistent proponent. Still, Nicholas dared to believe and had said to LaCroix at a later date, "*Credo quia impossible*," which had only infuriated the Russian more. If LaCroix knew that part of his "cure" was never to take pure blood again, the inferno that would follow would pale beside this show of temper and Nicholas had said nothing more.

He listened to Natalie's relaxed breathing, hearing the pulse of her blood in his ears like a counterpart to the music. She was probably the bravest woman he had ever know, having casually and insistently made herself a part of his singularly strange life, and doing it with such casual grace that he sometimes had to wonder at it. He did not know what drove her to work so hard for him, beside the physical attraction that played itself about them. The magnetism that was part and parcel of both his personality and his vampirism drew some to him like the proverbial moths to the flame.

The silence and the peace of the night was shattered quietly by the sudden, startling twitch of the silver ring he wore about his neck. Setting the glass of water he was vainly trying to drink aside, he reached inside the black tunic he wore, pulling the ring into the light. The huge star sapphire it held burned with an unholy light that carried a message Nicholas instinctively dreaded. He ran to the refrigerator and pulled out the gold-encrusted bottle that was stored there, dropping it into the pocket of the black trench he put on. It dragged the pocket down, but he ignored that.

"What is it, Nick?" Natalie put aside her glass and came to him, eyes mirroring the concern that he could feel flowing from her in waves. His eyes changed in a nanosecond to the true vampire's telltale bluish-white and she took an involuntary step back as she always did when his true self emerged. It was not the hunger but something else, then; no red tinge colored the blue. As much as they fought together to control this side of him, he knew it terrified her.

"I must go," he ground out between clenched teeth. Lack of blood had blunted certain of his instincts, but not to know **this**...to rely on a piece of metal to tell him....

"Where?" Natalie struggled to grab her coat and follow him, his movements almost too quick for her eye to see. She latched onto his arm as he went to one of the sliding glass doors, and was pulled through and almost over the railing.

"I must go now," he growled out, trying to remove her hand from his arm without harming her. "Now," he repeated, his urgency communicating itself to her. Refusing to let go after this last warning, they both went over the railing, Nicholas needing to use all his will to keep them both from crashing to the pavement of the empty alley.

After he had oriented them and they were speeding through the chill Canadian winter air to wherever it was his need was taking them, Natalie asked the inevitable question, "Where are we going?" But Nicholas didn't dare answer, needing all his strength to keep them on the air current they rode and follow the signal that drew him onward. His silence was all the answer Natalie would get. He had more important things on his mind.

LaCroix must be in serious danger of the true death if he called to Nicholas.

It took only minutes for him to find LaCroix and he drifted to the ground of the dirty back alley that he found his former mentor in, lying prone and still, blood pouring from a dozen wounds, light from the moon flickering in them like a lake. LaCroix had a habit of taking on the worst of the worst for his food, but this situation said that the one he had chosen this night had a great many friends who would protect him.

Keeping Natalie behind him, Nicholas went to LaCroix and knelt by his side, just as a gray shadow materialized to become his blood-sister, Janette, who knowing Nicholas would come, had protected her former lover until his arrival. "He said you would come."

Hurrying to LaCroix's side, Nick pulled out the bottle that would save the vampire's life. It contained the essence of his vampire life, the Russian's own blood, and would save LaCroix faster than the lifeblood of a dozen humans.

At his touch, LaCroix's eyes opened, sky-blue, wide and searching, perhaps wondering if his attackers had returned. "You came."

There was some surprise in the low husky voice, but the blonde ignored it. Nervously Nicholas looked up and down the alley, trying to determine of there was anyone else about. He saw nor felt nothing, but in his condition they could be upon him in minutes and he would not know it. Feeling foolish, he removed the stopper from the bottle, knowing Janette would detect anyone in the vicinity of blocks, just as he used to be able to do.

"Drink," he murmured to LaCroix, seeing the blue eyes narrow and turn the ruby red of deep hunger.

The ornate bottle was empty in minutes, and the wounds already starting to heal. LaCroix refused to let go of Nicholas' hand, his grip even now, far stronger than Nick could break. He stood up, and Nicholas' unbeating heart sank to the stomach as the red gaze turned to Natalie.

"No," Nicholas said as he blocked LaCroix's way.

*****

When you hurt me
Do you really mean to
You say you don't
I just wish I could believe you --

Michael Bolton, *Hot Love*

Natalie was wondering what she had done wrong in her past life to deserve a karma like this one. One vampire was bad enough, but a hungry one was the worst of all the possible scenarios her nightmares had ever envisioned.

She had never met this man, though for one moment she could have sworn they *had* met before. In his ignorance lay the danger. Janette loved Nicholas enough not to harm Natalie, knowing their relationship, but this other knew none of that. She knew that he only thought of his hunger now. She had had enough nights with Nicholas to know just how awful that hunger could be.

"I still need," LaCroix rasped out, voice setting a shiver up Natalie's spine. "Give me your blood."

Natalie knew to avert her eyes and under no circumstances look into the orbs that could mesmerize her into giving up her life, yet had to fight the voice that while it chilled her, worked to make his will hers...if she but listened to the persuasive sensuality of it. The vampire was not overly attractive, but there was something so compelling about his face that you wanted to look again and again to see how it changed. Hair cut military short only made the burning coal bright eyes all that much more difficult to avoid.

"No," Nicholas again repeated, standing before the man that could crush him without a thought...and denied him Natalie's life.

"Give me your blood then, Nicholas if this...human...means so much to you." The tone of venomous hate startled Natalie; it was not directed at Nicholas, but at *her, personally,* not just as a human that lived only to feed him. Even more startling was the tone of utter command that reached out and demanded obedience. Natalie couldn't imagine what he must have been like in life, but without a doubt he had commanded others and from long history expected immediate compliance to his smallest wishes.

Nicholas saw from the corner of his eye that Janette had moved closer, a secretive smile enhancing her already exotic looks. The black leather and velvet she wore only made her inherent sensuality more appealing, but he dragged his eyes away from her. She knew too much of what he endured to achieve the prize he sought and could give the entire game away with a few words.

Nicholas waited just a shade too long to respond and LaCroix's eyes narrowed. He knew the Russian would not tolerate an outright refusal. He would take what he needed, and Nicholas did not have enough blood in him to fill even a dipper, never mind give LaCroix what he needed.

His hesitation spoke volumes to the Prince and when the pause became even longer, Nicholas knew there would be a reckoning to pay. The blow that struck Nicholas was gentle, even if it did slam the blonde into the wall at his right. "We will...discuss this, Nicholas. In depth, at another time."

The threat was plain, and Nick knew a frission of fear.

"Come, Janette, we will leave Nicholas with his human bitch. For the time being." The laughter that trailed away as Janette carried LaCroix aloft held a faint sadness in it.

"Charming personality," was all Natalie said, but Nick could feel her fear just as plainly as his own.

He held her for only a few moments. "Let's get a cab and get the hell out of here."

*****

Baby, take a look at my face
And tell me you don't see what you started
No one's going to take your place
Right here by my side --

Michael Bolton,
Take a Look at My Face

Nick knew Natalie had questions, yet they were silent in the car returning them to his apartment. To take her to her home first would only mean that this unpleasant interlude would be discussed at another time. Still, he had too much to think about without Natalie's persistent questions. And persistent she would be, like a bull-dog with a marrow bone.

They had barely entered his loft before they started, and as he threw off the coat and returned the now empty bottle from habit to the fridge, he could peripherally hear her thoughts nearly bursting out of her skull. Standing by the door, apparently angry; at him, no doubt. He was almost amused. Natalie responded to fear by becoming angry. Invariably. With ever-unchanging pattern, he mused. He found patterns of behavior in his friends now, as he once had in his prey.

"Who the hell was that? And why did we go halfway across the city to save the ungrateful bastard?"

Nicholas sat down at the baby grand piano and played a few notes. How could he possibly say who and what LaCroix was to him? It wasn't even clear in his own mind. Their love-hate-love relationship had undergone many changes in the past centuries and no doubt would again, once LaCroix was stronger and was reminded of Nicholas' refusal.

"Aren't you going to answer me?"

That sounded a bit sharper than Natalie usually became and he could smell the fear on her. "You don't want to know. I shouldn't have taken you with me. That," he waved a hand in the general direction that they had come, "is not part of our lives. At least, it's not part of yours."

"My relationship with you makes it part of my life. But that's not the point. You were *afraid* of him."

"Weren't you?" he responded, watching as Natalie ran a tired hand through her dark brown hair and slumped into a soft chair. Evasions.

"Yes. I was terrified. Still am, as you very well know. But I'm curious. And you're not giving me any answers, Nick."

"There are none I can give. His name is Aleksandr Romanov. Prince Romanov of the almost extinct royal house of Russia. Calls himself LaCroix, now. Older than I am and far more dangerous in many different ways. Right now, he works, if you could call it that, as a dee jay on a radio station. His presence is usually...disturbing."

Nicholas began to play one of the Mozart pieces he had been listening to earlier, but trailed off after a few phrases. He was very glad that Natalie did not remember her first meeting with LaCroix on Valentine's Day -- it was burned into his own memory. At first it was a bluff, but Nick would have made her a vampire before letting LaCroix kill her. Maybe. He still wasn't sure. And that, more than anything disturbed him about that night.

"And...?" Natalie waived her hands at him, telling him that she knew there was more and wouldn't be frustrated by moderate evasiveness.

Nicholas came back to the present with a snap. "And...what else should there be?"

"You were afraid of him. And there was something else too." Natalie struggled to try to explain something that was so ephemeral that it was almost non-existent. "An almost expectant something in his voice that insisted on your immediate surrender to his will. I've never seen that happen before."

Nicholas stood and paced away from

her, suddenly tired and thirsty and without any energy, wanting only this night to end, for a fresh new day to start and for him to get on with his life, away from past hurts and desires. "Anyone with sense is wary of LaCroix. Please go home, Nat. I don't want to talk about this." Seeing she was about to argue he repeated, "Please."

With a frown of annoyance, she put her coat back on and grumbled about "avoiding her questions" and the "ungrateful dead" and "flying around Canada freezing her butt off" and ended with a surly, "good night."

Nick watched her go from his window, getting into her car without any problems. He didn't think LaCroix would move that quickly after the shock he'd had, but you could never tell. His tactician's brain was probably already coming up with any number of plans to trap Nicholas into dropping his guards and giving LaCroix the answers he wanted and the obedience he craved.

Hitting the button that would close his loft off from the sun's rays, Nicholas wondered how long it would take. He was certain it wouldn't be long at all before LaCroix confronted him and his constant disappearances from where he was expected, sending the Russian off on another trip to find his erstwhile son. Not long at all.

Not long at all.

*****

When you feel the hunger
Driving you on
To your one desire
Never deny your heart
Needs to be satisfied --

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

It came apart so fast that Nicholas almost didn't have any time to react.

The drug dealer that they had startled on a routine investigation had far too much coke on him to want to even smell police, never mind see them at his girlfriend's house. The gunfight didn't take long at all, but at the end of it, Nicholas had taken four bullets, Schanke two and the drug dealer and his girlfriend were both dead.

It wasn't until Schanke was taken to the hospital and Nick was assured that the detective would be all right, that he went home. The bullets were a minor inconvenience usually, but his blood loss recently had been fairly constant and with no living supply at hand to replenish it, he was in pain.

It wasn't until he got home and drank what little blood was left in the refrigerator that he realized he was in very real jeopardy of losing what little life he maintained. He lay upon his bed and looked up at the ceiling, wondering if it would hurt when he finally died. Without a fresh supply of blood he knew that this would be the last time he would have to worry about it.

Still -- he wouldn't kill a human to survive. He wouldn't become a creature like that, again.

While he wasn't afraid actually, he regretted that he would not be able to be there with Schanke and Nat, trying to save the sad, spinning little mudball planet he had called home for centuries. His perceptions were clouding and he almost didn't realize at first that it was Natalie bending over him, worry and fear beating off her in waves of distress. "I'll try a blood transfusion -- "

"No." His voice was weak and almost quavered. Blood taken that way might have saved his life, but it wasn't just the loss of blood that would destroy him, but the desire for blood would drive him mad long before his unusual body actually stopped functioning.

She hesitated before saying what he expected she would. "Then use my blood. I can always get a transfusion -- "

His fingers cut her strained voice off. He wanted to, oh how he did. He felt the hunger now, beating at his will, demanding he bite deep into her flesh and take what he needed to live. It would kill her; his hunger had a life of its own.

Still he ignored it. Blue eyes turning the deep red of hunger, Nicholas took Natalie's hand in his very cold one, closed his eyes, and with great expectation, waited for the final darkness to come.

*****

Said a lot of things
A lot of things I didn't mean to say
I never meant to hurt you
and I was wrong
to fight with you that way.
But I'm only human...

Michael Bolton,
Take a Look at My Face

Natalie spun about at the sound of rending metal and watched as the door fairly flew off its steel hinges. The man Nicholas had identified as LaCroix stood there, Janette behind him, both obviously not needing an invitation to enter Nicholas' sanctuary.

The real concern on the Russian's face didn't make Natalie feel any better but she didn't feel quite so frightened. Deep in her heart she hoped that he would have a bottle like Nicholas had had, ready to save his life.

"Nicholas," the tall man whispered, the tone so pain-filled, Natalie could only stare in astonishment. A gentle hand brushed the side of Nicholas' still face, and acknowledged the danger. "When was the last time he fed?"

"I -- I don't know. I mean, he hasn't...." Realizing she was babbling out one of Nicholas' most precious secrets, she silenced herself abruptly.

The sky blue eyes caught hers and refused to release them. "When?" he murmured, so seductively in tone, Natalie had to consciously fight with everything she had not to fall under its sway. It helped that she truly did not know how long it had been. Nicholas had been fighting his blood lust when they had met, though not to such extremes as they had worked out.

"How long?" he demanded, the guise of gentleness falling under the ruthless pressure he exerted on her mind.

"Months," she blurted, aghast that she had said anything.

The blue eyes flew open wide and a vicious snarl twisted his lips. "So, what Janette has told me is true. You still intrude -- humoring Nicholas in this delusion that he can fight his true nature. What idiocy."

The vampire stood erect, hand falling from Nick's face. "*I* am the only death he will ever know. And no one else shall give him release from it, least of all you."

Natalie noticed the ring on his finger then, exactly the same as Nicholas' and shining with an even greater brilliance than the stone had that night.

LaCroix followed where her eyes flew and bent over Nicholas' bed, speaking to the inert form laying there. "Not yet, my dear, not yet. When you go, I will go with you, but not yet."

Natalie tried to move forward and only then realized that Janette had a hold on her arms, her unnatural strength so much more than Natalie could have possessed to remove them. "Let me go!" she snapped inanely. She knew without a doubt that LaCroix had ordered this she-wolf to hold her and keep her held until he had need of her. She fought no more after looking into Janette's eyes....

* * * * *

In these eyes
Seen a river of tears
Seen the strong survive --

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

Nicholas sensed a presence and opened his eyes, sighing a little as he did so. LaCroix. He should have known. For the moment, he truly hated him, and yet, seeing the near-fear etched on the carven face, he knew how much LaCroix fought the loss of yet another of his "children."

"LaCroix, please...let me go," he whispered, knowing that the blood-lust would soon be upon him, that fight though he would, it could overwhelm him.

"No, Nicholas, not yet, not yet. Don't be in such a rush to leave me." The Russian smiled then, feeling the blood-lust within Nicholas and knowing it would not be long. Still, better not to take chances. Nicholas could surprise him with the strength of his will and very often did. He wouldn't take the risk.

"I want it to be over, LaCroix. Now. I'm tired of fighting..." Nicholas trailed off, tired and longing.

"If you didn't want me to come, Nicholas, why didn't you just separate yourself from the ring?" He waited for an answer, but none came, other than Nicholas turning his head away. Relentless, he went on, "No doubt it didn't even occur to you. After all this time, it wouldn't have made any difference anyway. I have always known when you were in mortal danger whether you wore it or not. But if you had not removed it from your hand, then I would have come all the faster."

LaCroix smiled, glancing over to see if the woman was sufficiently under Janette's control. Yes...she lay sprawled on the couch, eyes open, but unresisting, no fight in the lax limbs. Good.

"Our bond is too strong for you to willingly sever it by removing the ring, though I see it no longer rests on your finger. Then where....?" Long fingers stroked over Nicholas prone body, feeling the muscles twitch in response. Such a passionate thing his Nicholas was. Ripping the turtleneck in two, he caressed the slide of muscle there, admiring the pale flesh. The ring lay there, inert, it's brilliance fading, slowly. Enough play.

"Janette," he rapped out, his voice a command. She walked the conscious woman over, admiring the long line of her neck.

"Since you had this luscious feast before you and yet resisted, your will is too strong for me to bend," the sarcastic voice drawled. "And if you could amputate your ring finger to remove my gift, the pain you are in is not enough to make you drink. Even if your finger would grow back by the next night." He perused Natalie's figure with a practiced eye. "She is beautiful, in a very human way."

LaCroix rose off the bed and stroked Natalie's neck, her moan loud in the otherwise silent room. The only breathing heard was hers.

"No," Nicholas struggled, yet could not find the strength to rise. "No, LaCroix, please. Don't kill her." The thought of Natalie's vibrant life being snuffed with no more effort than a candle repulsed him. "No please. I beg you." While he wasn't in love with Natalie, any threat to her was more than he could bear, and LaCroix knew it, the bastard.

"Return the ring to it's place." The sentence lay in the air like a thunder-cloud, threatening.

"Swear to me," Nicholas replied, his words underlining his lack of trust.

"Return the ring and I will not kill her." The sensuality of it was meant for Nicholas alone, yet Natalie trembled too.

It had been LaCroix's voice that had drawn Nicholas to him at first, he remembered. To put on the ring would mean, that like Janette, he accepted LaCroix's dominance over him.

And for Nicholas it meant becoming LaCroix's lover once again, nevermore to fly from him, to leave the Prince to search again. He knew then, as he had known, when he awoke, that LaCroix would never let him go, and would use whatever means he had to keep him from fleeing. Natalie's life was the price of his compliance.

Seeing LaCroix lower his lips to Natalie's neck, he cried out, "Wait, damn you."

With trembling fingers and barely enough strength to even complete this simple maneuver, he snapped the chain from the ring and placed it on the ring-finger of his left hand, hating it all the more when he felt it squeeze around the flesh like the living thing it almost was. He didn't want to know what kind of magic made the ring what it was, but the only way to remove it was death or amputation, which hadn't been very successful.

All three vampires shivered when the ring was settled once again in its rightful place. It created a stronger bond between the three of them and LaCroix and Janette felt Nicholas' pain and anguish all the more for its replacement.

Without hesitation, LaCroix bit into the softness of Natalie's neck, taking only blood enough to fill the inside of his mouth. He had fed well for many nights, he could do without this one. Eyes burning fire, he returned to Nicholas, gesturing Janette to return the woman to the couch. She had fulfilled her part in this. Janette left them then, knowing LaCroix would not want an audience for this.

* * * * *

From the day I found you
You brought the light into my heart
So don't take your love away from me
Leave me in the dark --

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

Nicholas knew he had no strength to fight what was about to happen, but closed his eyes against it. At least Natalie was safe. LaCroix would never break his word.

LaCroix's arms around him were like bands of steel, chains he would never be able to break again. His soul cried out within him, damning his fate all the more when he felt LaCroix' lips touch his mouth very gently, demanding entry.

"Don't fight me, Nicholas," the tempting voice begged.

And it was begging, Nicholas knew. Alone together, LaCroix had no need to dominate. His very presence was temptation enough for the blonde. Why that was he would never know. The Russian had always been his Achilles' heel, enough for him to follow him into the damned life he lived now.

Nicholas could smell the blood on LaCroix, and he panicked, arms thrashing uselessly to push the Russian from him. The borrowed warmth of Natalie's blood drew him on, and his mouth opened under LaCroix's insistent pressure. He tasted the blood...and was lost to the whirling need of it. He sucked the Russian's mouth dry and demanded more, his tongue searching all the soft crevices, clutching the Russian ever closer. Not needing to breathe, this went on for much longer than with any human, and he could feel LaCroix reveling in it.

Nicholas only knew that the lust for blood had been revived in him and the moan that tore it's way out of his throat was heartfelt. If he could have cried, he would have, and even LaCroix's love made no difference in this.

"Hush, darling, hush. I gave you immortal life once...let me do it again."

Nicholas trembled, knowing he could not escape what would come next, yet wanting to so badly it made him struggle all the harder.

"So be it, then. Fight me, as you did not do hundreds of years ago. Resist it, knowing that my blood running through you is inevitable. I will never let you go, Nicholas, not even when we both enter Death's arena for the final time. Never."

It was this quiet determination that made Nicholas push with the last of his strength, jump off the bed, and head straight for the window. The loft was high enough that he would break his neck....

Whether LaCroix divined his intent or not, it made no difference. Nicholas was far too slow, and knew it as he crashed through the window, feeling the evening breeze on his face...and then the strong hands take his body and fling him back into the room. Laying there dazed for a moment, he heard the steel shutters descend as LaCroix lowered them, not taking any chances.

"You are a constant surprise, my Nicholas. Death is preferable to my touch, eh? We shall see about that," LaCroix snarled, fear turning his gentleness to fury.

He held Nicholas against his body like an unresisting rag doll, too stunned to resist at the moment. With a fingernail, LaCroix opened his own carotid artery and pressed Nicholas' lips to the open wound.

Nicholas sighed and surrendered. He could resist his nature no longer, and with questing tongue tasted the liquid that poured slowly into his mouth. It was like being slowly electrocuted, and the hunger for more brought his vampire nature to his height. They crashed to the floor, Nicholas, leech-like, clutching LaCroix while the Russian moaned his pleasure.

Nicholas heard him from far away. It was as pleasurable being taken as it was in the taking, Nicholas knew from long experience. He had tried to give his victims what pleasure he could before he bit them, making the sensation more intense.

But for one vampire taking the blood of another it was so much more. It was as intense and as hot and cold and hurried as human sex, but so much more. Nicholas wanted to drain LaCroix dry, but the gift was too strong for him, and what he took was

enough.

* * * * *

Though I'd never tell you
Just what my heart's concealing
You're the lover I need in my life
Can you feel what I'm feeling...?

Michael Bolton,
Take a Look at my Face

Dr. Lambert would never have believed the change in her friend, the Russian mused, watching Nicholas lift his head once to smile at him, and then lower it again, lips dripping his blood. Ice-blue eyes shone and his flesh was flushed, only making his remarkable beauty more apparent.

LaCroix took it all in, knowing his love for Nicholas had led him down some strange paths, but needing him more than he needed any life, vampire or human. He hungered now, not just for blood, but Nicholas' blood, the taste of it more of a narcotic than any other he had encountered. He wanted to feel Nicholas writhe under him, trying to resist this dark pleasure that they shared.

This was why he had made Nicholas a vampire several hundred years ago, and why he could never let him go now, even when he begged so. He, Prince Aleksandr Romanov, master of all he knew, a vampire for almost a thousand years, could not survive without his lover. And Nicholas had no idea of the strength of his love. No concept of how it drew him, how he needed him, more than any blood.

And probably never would. LaCroix would never tell him, something in him rebelling in the very idea that his love needed to be spoken to one who had loved and been loved for centuries. His pride wouldn't let him, and while he damned it, knowing it kept Nicholas from his side, he could not gainsay it.

Nicholas eyes burned hot and the ring shone with the same light, as he finally lifted his head. His vampire life was safe for the moment, and LaCroix did not miss the seemingly small amount Nicholas had taken from him, though it was almost half of his entire body's supply. He had found that his own need for blood became less intense as he aged, and now, almost a thousand years later, it was only necessary for him to take blood once or twice a week. And while it would surprise Nicholas to the depths of his being, he only killed when he choose. He had not killed a human for food in a very, very long time. Yet he hadn't told Nicholas or Janette.

Had to keep his air of mystery intact somehow, he thought wryly.

His beloved need never know how he and Janette had staged the "attack" that left him in the alley, waiting for Nicholas to come, bound in ways he had undoubtedly never even considered. LaCroix had to see him, especially after his aborted attempt to "return" with the good doctor's disgusting drug. Nicholas as a junkie was an awful sight, and it burned in his mind. But the blonde had avoided him, never being where he was expected...to the extent that LaCroix hungered just to see him, to know with his own eyes that he was well. Or as well as Nicholas could be, resisting his own nature to the point of near death, and diminished capabilities.

It was time Nicholas understood the lengths to which he would go to keep him, so that this foolishness never happened again. He would not risk Nicholas' life ever again.

* * * * *

No looking back
The chance will never come again
You risk it all
For your dreams
Won't let you go.

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

"So beautiful you are, my Nicholas. You would tempt a marble saint."

Nicholas only laughed, fangs drawn, eyes alight with the passion between them. Vampire he was now, completely, and he could not resist the way it changed him, made him harder, more passionate, more cruel. And LaCroix...his blood was so strong. It made Nicholas stronger than he had ever

been and he reveled in it, once more exploring the full capabilities his vampirism gave him.

Rising, he went to Natalie, seeing her as any predator would, in shadows and bright spots of pocketed heat. She was sleeping now, "dead to the world" as the vernacular went, and he was content with that. LaCroix had kept to his word, which was only what Nicholas had expected. While LaCroix had been many things in his long life, his word was his honor, and the Prince would not sully that.

His gaze returned to LaCroix again, comfortably laying on Nicholas' bed, propped up on a pillow...that look in his bright blue eyes. Nicholas had never deciphered just what that look meant, what was going on behind that ever so superior exterior.

"She was delicious, wasn't she, Nicholas?" LaCroix broke the silence.

Nicholas smiled and returned to him, sitting on the bed near his lover. "You were better," he grinned, all boyishness. The same boyishness that infuriated Janette so.

"Ah, of course I was." LaCroix preened smugly. "I've aged well."

Nicholas laughed then. "You sound like a bottle of wine."

"I've missed you, Nicki," was all he said, but it sobered Nicholas' merriment. "You said once to Janette, that you 'couldn't be this anymore.' Yet you never said it to me. Why?"

Nicholas struggled to find the words. "It sounds...ungrateful. You gave me life, and continue to give me life when I lay dying, whether I want it or not. Always there when I needed you, and even when I don't. At my side...to throw it away...I never wanted to hurt you."

LaCroix raised a questioning eyebrow, doubt foremost in his eyes.

He shrugged broad shoulders. "Perhaps I did. I needed my freedom from you, from the stifling dominance you hold over me. You held me so close...."

LaCroix sighed, the sound surprising Nicholas. "I couldn't bear to let you go. Do you remember what I told you when I found you after you had taken that awful drug? 'I will never let you go.' Can you not guess why?"

Nicholas just gazed at him, blankly. "We are family."

LaCroix snapped, his patience at thin ebb. "Why did I make you a vampire, Nicki? Why eternal life?"

"You wanted a son, and in Janette a daughter. You said you found me fitting, beautiful enough to make the angels weep."

"True. To me your beauty is remarkable, even more so in death. But while you are my son in death, you are more."

Nicholas was puzzled by the harshness in LaCroix he sensed now. What was he trying to tell him? And why couldn't he just say it?

Irritation with this subtle game washed away the mellow afterglow he was feeling. "Just say it, damn it. Enough games."

"Do you know why it enrages Janette so when you deny your vampire nature, Nicholas?"

"She feels rejected."

"It's more than that, my dear. You see, if and when you ever do find a way to return...if I cannot change you back...your Death will be by my hand. And then my own. I will not live without you."

* * * * *

You could think it over
You could make it easy
I'm the lover you need on your life
If you still don't believe me...

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

LaCroix feared he had made a vital mistake seconds after it escaped his lips. Nicholas sat stone-still, eyes unfocused into the distance. He shivered once, terror like he had never felt before enclosing round him. He waited for the inevitable rejection.

* * * * *

You leave me so cold
Don't know whether I'm coming or going
There's no way of knowing
With you...

Michael Bolton, *Hot Love*

If Nicholas' heart could still beat, that quietly voiced declaration would have made in shudder in shock. As it was, he stood up suddenly, needing to move and walked to the piano. Had he heard correctly? Was he hallucinating from the blood he had taken? Was LaCroix saying he could convert him back if he ever did regain humanity? And if he couldn't, he'd kill, draining him of all blood, and destroying him?

And then follow Nicholas into Death?

Why? What reason...?

LaCroix was possessive to a fault, but this was extreme. Had the Russian gone mad as so many of their kind did when age became greater than their ability to adapt? No. The Prince was a chameleon, always involved in the constant struggle to adapt and blend in with his surroundings.

He was in his somewhat right mind. Then why?

A memory flashed into his mind, of Janette. She was complaining that boys were always loved more by their fathers, than daughters were. Love? Vampires didn't love in the usual sense of the word. It wasn't the same as human love, caused by pheromones, and endorphins. It was deeper, stronger, years twining mental and emotional locks around souls, guaranteeing that when one finally found the true death, all in that blood line would mourn.

In the beginning Nicholas believed himself in love with LaCroix. They had been incredible together, never wanting to be parted, denying any and all other bonds. When had that changed?

When Nicholas decided that being a killer was something he could no longer do to assuage the blood lust within him.

LaCroix, desperate, told him it would get better, that the desire would fade with every year that passed. But Nicholas would not believe, and escaped, and continued to run, always finding LaCroix would come, following like a hound, tormenting him in his desire to believe that this eternal thirst would end.

Nicholas had shut off the part of his soul that wanted LaCroix, and that had wanted him, for every day of his existence. Did LaCroix know how Nicholas felt about him? How he fought the hunger to be with the man, to live inside his soul, to sleep with him in the day, to be everything that the Russian wanted him to be? He had been hiding it for so long, he didn't think about it often, perhaps every century. And he would mourn that he had to give up the one person that made him truly live as a vampire, to find some peace in his soul. But was it peace he had now?

No. It was endless and utter torment, and he knew that if he let this chance go, he might as well find the true death. Except that would kill his lover too.

Lover. Nicholas loved LaCroix and had since before the change.

He could think that now. His lover.

They had been lovers while Nicholas had been human, and in seconds he knew what it was LaCroix needed, wanted, must have.

*****

You come on like a fire burning
and I'm lost in your flame
Over and over again...

Michael Bolton, *Hot Love*

LaCroix didn't dare move. He dreaded what Nicholas was about to say, do.

It came as quite a surprise when Nicholas turned with *that smile* and proceeded to walk back to the bed, stripping his black jacket away as he came. Desiring Nicholas was as instinctive as sucking blood, and he found he couldn't move away, enjoying the sight presented, as Nicholas came before him, shirt hanging off his shoulders, open to the navel.

Something was different here, and the Russian sensed it belatedly, as he ran his hands over the flat nipples and rippled muscles of the abdomen presented before him. Nicholas had been a warrior in his past life, and LaCroix had insured that he was as close to physical perfection as he would ever become before he took him over. Inch by inch, more of the pale skin LaCroix craved was given to him, his hands making short work of the black shirt, fondling the biceps

he so adored. Such strength here.

Treasuring him so, LaCroix took gentle care, proceeding to strip his lover and lay him across the bed, Nicholas' head hanging off the edge, neck bared in invitation. The Russian stood back and looked his fill, desire to taste this flesh overwhelming him. It had been centuries since he had been able to look and touch the object of his adoration, and he didn't wait now, his hands and mouth licking and fondling from the tip of the elegant, small feet to the blonde hair.

"I will always find you, Nicholas," the Russian murmured. "Run from me no longer."

A sad smile creased the sensual mouth. "Run? To where? You are always in my mind, in the very soul of me. I cannot truly ever escape."

LaCroix moaned softly, accepting Nicholas' capitulation as a gift from the gods, whoever they may be and moved to take the soft neck so close to his lips.

But before he could bite, he heard the soft voice whisper, "I'm in love with you, Aleksandr Nicoleyivich Romanov. I have been since the first day. How could you not know?"

The surprise the Prince felt then was nothing in comparison to the heated shock of Nicholas' pulling his head down to the soft flesh below his lips. "Take me. Make me yours again...finally, forever."

The shock could not be compared to the lust he felt at this request and he bit deep, feeling Nicholas jump, moan and clutch tighter. Behind his eyelids he could imagine Nicholas' face, flushed and hungry, twisting and turning in delighted passion and drank as deeply as he could, not caring if he drained Nicholas dry, hungering for him, wanting to return the gift the younger man had give him. Nicholas cries became wilder and his motion more violent until LaCroix turned...giving Nicholas access to his own neck.

With a soft sigh, Nicholas took what was offered...and time became something others worried about. How long they lay sharing blood was unknown. The intensity of the pleasure hit peaks that would have killed a normal man and neither wanted to let it end. But dawn was coming, and with it the lethargy that the day produced.

Nicholas let his lover go, satisfied in a way that he had never known before. LaCroix released his grip soon after, eyes stained almost black with his desire, the blue slowly returning to them.

Without a word, he pulled Nicholas close, and lay back against the pillows, knowing he would not rest without his native earth below him, but not caring. Nicholas was the only sustenance he needed now, and it would be enough.

*****

Blame it on love
Has it all and its not enough
You'll never change
Straight to the fire
It never ends.

Michael Bolton, *Hot Love*

Natalie woke soon after dawn. At first, she was completely disoriented and had no idea of what she was doing in Nick's loft. She rose and wandered about, making herself a cup of tea from supplies Nick kept for her and wandered about the apartment trying to get her bearings. Why couldn't she remember last night?

She sorted through what memories she could. Nicholas and Schanke had both been shot; Schanke went to the hospital and Nick came home, drained of more blood than he could live without. Natalie's heart beat frantically as she remembered that Nick had refused all methods to save him...and then the door had flown open.

LaCroix and Janette had entered...and there was nothing after that...but eyes and the feeling that something important had occurred. With a whispered moan, Natalie felt her neck, the slight soreness there and sat down suddenly, her tea sloshing out of the mug to land on the hardwood floor as her head fell into her hands.

Nick had...had *bitten* her...probably urged on by Janette and the other one he feared so.

She jumped as a pair of well-shod feet

came to stand by her. She looked up to see LaCroix, his hand extended to raise her to her feet. Natalie scrambled up without his help and backed away.

"No need to fear me, my dear," he said, remaining where he was and looking remarkably...human.

"Who are you? And where's Nicholas?" she blurted out, her hip slamming into the table and stopped there.

"I am Lucien LaCroix, an old...friend of Nicholas. He's told you of me, I'm sure. Nicholas is asleep, but quite safe. Somewhat thanks to you."

Natalie raised her hand to her neck. "Nick..."

"Oh, no, Doctor. That was me," LaCroix smugly informed her, apparently taking pleasure in telling her that.

"You?" It came out a shocked squeak, and Natalie knew she wasn't up to a conversation like this one now. She'd need sleep, and hot coffee and maybe brandy before she could handle this...

"Only a mouthful, my dear, I assure you. As a temptation for Nicholas, if you will."

Natalie's head spun. Usually so clear-headed, she was having a desperate time just forming sentences this morning. "I don't believe a word you say. I'll speak to Nick tonight."

"As you wish." He turned away and then turned back, something in his posture menacing. "And, Doctor, no more drugs. Nicholas is quite aware of what will happen should he ever regain his "humanity."

"And I assure you," his eyes glowed with the power within him, "that should he ever be harmed again due to one of your potions, I'll rip your heart out with my very own hands, and feed on it. Do I make myself clear?"

That brought Natalie's spine straight with a snap. Anger flowed through her, making her stronger and less frightened. "Who are you to say what Nick should have?"

"He is mine, and has been mine for all his immortal life. Do not attempt to interfere. Nicholas bought your life last night with his own. Don't tempt me further, Doctor. I won't hesitate to give you to Janette for her enjoyment. She finds you very attractive."

That rattled Natalie, and she swallowed the acid taste that had come into her mouth at the thought of being desired by a vampire. Well, a vampire other than Nick. She almost laughed at that, and realized she was in shock, still.

"It's Nicholas' decision, LaCroix," she snapped, not willing to let this monster see her terror.

"And he has made it." Suddenly he smiled, seeming to remember something that pleased him. "Go, now. See him tonight. He will tell you."

With that he disappeared, or seemed to to Natalie's eyes. She knew too many vampire tricks to think he had actually disappeared. He'd just moved faster than her eyes could see.

With a sigh, she pulled on the raincoat that she had arrived in last night and left the loft.

Tonight would tell. And she would need some sleep to handle it.

* * * * *

Hot love
You leave me so cold
One touch and you got me where you want me

Michael Bolton, *Hot Love*

Nick awoke with the setting sun and stretched, feeling better than he had in a hundred years. The decisions he had made during the night chased themselves around in his mind.

He looked about and saw LaCroix raising the metal shutters, as immaculate as when he had first arrived the night before. Of course, he did not rest as well as Nicholas, not laying on his own soil, but Nick would soon take care of that. He rose, pulling on a robe and thinking he really had no need of such modesty with this man, and let the love he felt rush into him.

Before he touched his lover, he realized something was missing. Natalie was gone; that was to be expected. But, something else was not right.

He did not hunger for blood. There

hadn't been a night in his entire after-life that he hadn't desired blood with a need that blotted out all else. But tonight, it wasn't there.

LaCroix watched him now, a smile playing about his sculpted mouth. "Missing something, Nicki? The sweet doctor left this morning in a bit of a hurry, and wanted to see you this evening. Something else? Oh, yes. The blood-lust that has tormented you every day of your immortal life."

He said no more.

Frustrated, Nicholas came closer, and laid a hand on his arm. "What's happened, Lucien? I don't understand it. Last night was-- " he couldn't find the words, but the expression of puzzled happiness on his open face said it all.

The taller man leaned down to gently kiss the pale lips before him, marveling that he once again had the right to do so. "Yes, Nicholas, yes. I haven't hungered like that in over a hundred years. I need only take nourishment occasionally, and now you have that same immunity to it. Not that you can do without it altogether, but since you have such an aversion to sucking the blood of beautiful women, or men for that matter, you can always take -- "

"Wait a minute," Nicholas interrupted. "Are you telling me that I won't have the desire to...is that possible?"

LaCroix pulled Nicholas into his arms. "The blood that flows in your veins now is mine, and as age had made my desires somewhat blunted, my blood is doing the same for you. And will continue to, even if we are separated. You need only take blood when you choose, not when necessity demands. And whatever you do, stop drinking that disgusting blood-wine blend in your refrigerator. It tastes awful." He made a face of pure disgust and Nicholas laughed.

"It served its purpose."

"I suppose it did. But that purpose is gone now, my love. You can live as a human, for the most part, without having to take their precious lives. Unless you want to," the pragmatist in LaCroix commented casually.

He would always be a warrior at heart, Nicholas mused. Lucien could not change who and what he was. And Nicholas found he was finally content with that.

"We need to get something else straightened out." Nicholas pushed away from LaCroix and he let him go. "What are we going to do?"

LaCroix cocked his head. "What do you want, Nicholas?" he asked, all superior smugness wiped away from his face and voice. He would give his own life to just be here right now, to be able for all his days to be here.

"To continue my life here, as a police officer; to live with you, be with you; to have my friends as I choose, not as you decide; never again to be forced away from what I believe to be right; and to live the life I see fit, away from the bloodshed of our Family."

LaCroix thought for a minute. "You won't leave me again?"

Nicholas smiled and ducked his head. "Not without reason. And probably not even then. I don't think I could."

"Then I am satisfied, my Nicholas. That is all I ask from you, forever."

*****

Nicholas went to the hospital first to see Schanke. His partner was still under the grip of a great many drugs and not very conscious, but the doctors assured him that the detective would be just fine. Myra was as worried as she always was when Schanke was down, but she smiled brightly for Nicholas and thanked him for saving her husband's life. When he tried to tell her otherwise, she ignored his words, and continued to believe what Schanke had always told her. Nick looked out for his partner first and himself last.

LaCroix waited outside patiently. He found he was satisfied to wait for Nicholas, to follow his life for a while, to see what others thought of him and their strange relationship. For it was agreed between them that LaCroix would not fade and blend into the woodwork whenever one of his friends or acquaintances came by. If anyone noticed that they were both pale as ghosts, they would assume LaCroix was affected by the same disease Nicholas had, and so weren't too far from the truth.

The next stop was the Coroner's office, and LaCroix again waited outside Natalie's office, only for the doctor's sake, as he could hear whatever was said anyway and Nicholas knew it.

* * * * *

Remembering all your loves
Burning you so
Till you feed the fire
Through the endless night
Needs never satisfied --

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

Nicholas watched as Natalie gave her assistant the heave-ho from her office and faced the detective.

"So, what the hell is actually going on here, Nick? That ghoul LaCroix scared the shit out of me this morning, threatening me if I interfered again and insisting that you wanted to stay as you are." Her face was flushed with her anger, and Nicholas admired how it made her eyes shine.

He smiled. "Everything's fine, Nat. We've come to an agreement -- I stay a vampire and everyone goes on living." The outrage on her face grew, and he forestalled the next explosion. "It's my choice, Natalie. Really it is. LaCroix...made me a vampire." He ignored her gasp. "He didn't do it out of blood lust, but rather more a basic kind of lust."

She still looked puzzled, but less angry.

"He loves me very much, Nat. And that's the basis of his rage when I tried to 'return.'" She opened her mouth to speak and he raised a hand. "Let me finish. The only hold Lucien has over me is the one I give him. He doesn't control me, doesn't make me say this.

"I want this Nat. More than I have ever wanted anything else in my lives. Please understand."

"This change is just too much, Nick. Suddenly, everything you've wanted for years is thrown away, and you're more than happy to be a vampire, like him? And what kind of *love*," she sneered, "would insist that you become like him in the first place?"

The door opened and LaCroix stood in the doorway. "Perhaps I can answer that for you, Doctor." His eyes met Nicholas' and acknowledged the slight nod. Natalie, irritated at their unspoken communication, waved him in.

LaCroix leaned against the wall, ten paces away from her, but she shifted and moved back anyway, giving him more than adequate room to speak his thoughts.

"When I first met Nicholas, he was only a boy and I was already a man and a vampire. He fell in very much human love with me and I returned that as best I could, given my nature. He was stunning then and very difficult to resist even with the harshness of a maturing warrior about him.

"He knew I was different. And when he finally found out, as I knew he would, what it was I wanted from him, he was quite... taken aback and avoided me. Sooner or later, his curiosity refused to let him rest, and he came to me. We became lovers that very night."

Nicholas shifted uncomfortably. Natalie was staring at him, hard, annoyance painted on her face. Annoyance at his then-stupidity, he was sure.

"So..that continued for quite some time, until Nicholas was mortally wounded. He was not yet changed enough to come over and would have died." The iron control LaCroix carried about him like a shield faltered. "He would have died, the bright light of him extinguished, forever. Very selfishly, I refused to let that happen and make certain in that crowded makeshift infirmary that he would be mine, never to grown old and die, to lose the handsomeness that made grown men stop and turn to look."

The vampire stood straight, no apologies in the line of his body. "As I say, it was selfish on my part, but he did not choose to go 'softly into that good night' either. And so he is as you have known him. One of the oldest vampires alive, continuing to live only because of me.

"Do you blame me, doctor? Wouldn't you, given the same choice, choose life, in whatever form it took? Wouldn't you, even now, do anything to continue his life, no matter the cost?"

Natalie looked away and wouldn't meet

the eyes boring into hers. She knew what she had offered to Nicholas last night. Anything just so he would not leave her.

LaCroix continued. "I would. And did. Damn me if you choose, I care not."

Natalie said nothing for a long while. She felt a complete fool. And angry because Nick had not told her all he should have, and so indirectly, led her to believe something that was not so. That he had not become a vampire of his own will. But he had and chose to remain in a seeming half-life that she would never willingly join, even to be with him.

"Natalie?" Nick came to her then, standing just inches away. "I don't want to lose the friendship I've gained with you. Can you understand? I can't let him go. I'd rather find the true Death." He held her then, sensing her disappointment.

LaCroix hissed and sighed, leaving the room as quietly as he had come. If his heart still beat, it would have been frantic at that admission and he let the passion of it warm his soul. After all his despised prayers, Nicholas had finally come back to him.

To stay eternally in their forever night.

*****

Epilogue

Blame it on love
Has it all and it's not enough
You'll never change
Straight to the fire
It never ends.

Michael Bolton, *The Hunger*

At her apartment, high above the Vancouver streets, Natalie sat on her sofa late that night, emotions slightly the worse for wear from the bottle of wine she had guzzled down, absorbing her sense of hurt, loss and disappointment.

She didn't look out of her patio door, the curtains drawn aside to view the night sky. She had gotten so used to being a night owl with Nick, absorbing the beauty it held, that she couldn't imagine changing her lifestyle now.

She didn't look out into the dark night.

She didn't see the shape that hovered silently, in the darkness.

She didn't see the sharp fangs and dark eyes that watched her, intently.

She didn't see the one person that would be more than happy to take away the pain of her heart, bright as a beacon.

She didn't see Janette.

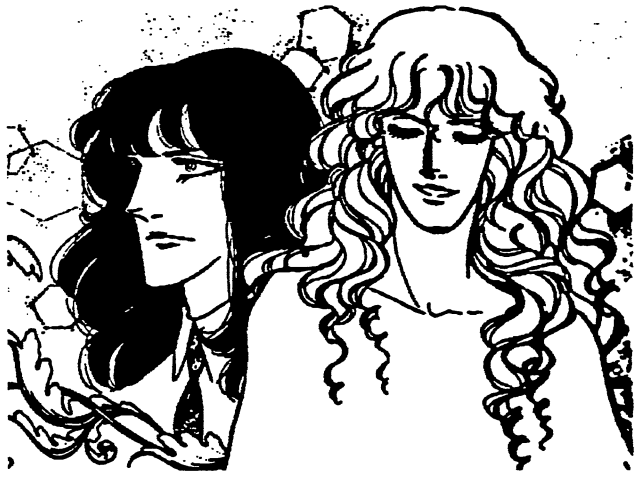
But she would.

DEN OF THIEVES
By K. L. Fidelius

This story is based on the Japanese comic book series, *From Eroica, With Love.* I had heard other fans raving about it, but until it recently became available in English it remained beyond me.

These comic books were intended for teenage girls. Don't ask; I don't understand it either. What the episodes show is the development of a "/" relationship between star-crossed lovers: the wild, openly gay British international art thief Eroica and the totally repressed German NATO officer Eberbach. I have actually toned down Eberbach's language; he is not only profane and obscene, but so obsessively prejudiced he makes Archie Bunker look politically correct. The total opposite of Eroica, of course. The only thing the two men have in common is that they are both drawn as breathtakingly beautiful, and they are both professionals at what they do.

This story is set after "The Alaskan Front," the last episode so far translated into English. It is around 1981, and the Cold War is raging. If you don't know the series, I hope I've given enough clues that you can follow my story.



Major Klaus Heinz von dem Eberbach stood in his supervisor's office in NATO headquarters, waiting for his next assignment. His boss's eyes twinkled in a way that warned him it was not what he would consider good news.

"What we've got here," said the short, balding man behind the desk, "is an unexpected opportunity. Hoffman Gantt and his gang of thieves broke into the safe of an arms dealer, figuring rightly that they would find a fortune in unmarked money. They also, however, found the secret plans for a new Soviet weapon. But it seems that these are patriotic thieves: they want to give the plans to NATO."

"So let them," responded Eberbach, lighting a cigarette. "What does that have to

do with me?"

"It seems they want something in return."

"Should've known. What do they want?"

"One of their number released from prison."

"Not something I can control," said Eberbach, his long legs taking him in a restless pacing pattern across the office as he dragged smoke deep into his lungs. "Why have you called me in? If that Ero-bugger is connected with this theft—"

"No, he's not. But, you must admit, because of your association with Eroica you are my most knowledgeable agent when it comes to the criminal element. We have arranged the release of Franz Uger into your custody."

"My custody?"

"You will escort him to Berlin. There you will meet with this Hoffman Gantt, and determine whether the plans for the Red Bear tank are genuine. If they are, you bring the plans back to Bonn, and leave Uger free in Berlin."

"That sounds...too simple," said Eberbach. "One of the other agents could easily do it."

"No—these are tricky people. We don't know how far to trust Gantt—he may try to palm off some obsolete tank plan on us, or some kind of forgery. He may just want his gang member out of prison, and have cooked up this scheme to free him. Uger may try to escape at any point from the moment you leave the prison until you enter the den of thieves in Berlin. Should all proceed as planned until you are there, you are an expert on tanks. You don't release the prisoner until you are absolutely certain that the plans are genuine."

"I don't like this," said Eberbach, stubbing out his cigarette. "Criminals should not be let go in trade for political secrets."

"That's out of our hands," replied his pot-bellied boss. "It's your mission, Eberbach."

"Well," said the Major, "at least it doesn't involve chasing women or flipping skirts on statues. And there is nothing artistic in it whatsoever. For once, I should be able to accomplish my mission without the interference of Eroica!"

In his castle on London's North Downs, Dorian Red Gloria, Earl of Gloria, lounged in one of the parlors in a state of vague discontent. There was only one thing in the world he wanted to steal, and it was something he could not get without the cooperation of the man he wished to steal it from.

He held a framed drawing of a man with shoulder-length black hair. It was not a good likeness, and definitely not good art, as it romanticized its subject outrageously. Nevertheless, he spent some time almost every day looking at it...and daydreaming.

With a decisive thump, he set the drawing down on a nearby table and picked up the thick envelope from his clipping service. It provided news articles from around the world on anything of artistic significance. A gold statue of Kali was being loaned from Calcutta to Tokyo. A Gainsboro was up for auction at Sotheby's. A collection of Inuit totem masks were on display in Toronto. None of that interested him.

It would have, once. It really was time to steal something. He could pluck that Gainsboro from its protective custody within the hour, and he had excellent connections with Sotheby's insurers. The finder's fee would keep Mr. James, his accountant, happy for at least a week.

He owed it to his followers not to let that opportunity pass. He rose and started upstairs to examine his wardrobe and design a plan.

The telephone rang. He paused as he heard Mr. James's voice asking who was paying for the call. Long distance, then. Maybe something interesting to counter his ennui.

It was his Italian Mafia contact, Gian-

Maria Borobollonte. "Eroica, my dear friend, I have news for you. That NATO Major who treated you so badly in Roma—Eberbach?"

"Yes? What about him?" the Earl asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"He's about to get his comeuppance!" Borobollonte said with a hearty laugh. "You know Hoffman Gantt?"

"The German master thief. Yes. He specializes in stealing from government and industry."

"True, but you know his other proclivity."

"The same as my own. What of it?" Eroica had had a brief affair with Hoffman Gantt when he first aspired to become a world class thief. He had learned a great deal about safe-cracking and security systems, but had quickly tired of being a decoration for the master thief to display in his salons. Gantt hadn't taken the very young Earl seriously until Eroica had departed—taking with him Gantt's heirloom Rolex and 100,000DM from the master's own safe.

"Have you been to his salons recently?" Borobollonte asked.

"Not for more than four years."

"Well, you may want to attend the next one! Gantt refuses to close a deal now without some kind of sexual performance from the person he's dealing with—and the more the person hesitates, the higher the stakes go. The word is...Gantt has made some kind of weapons deal with Iron Klaus! Isn't that delicious?"

Eroica felt his heart drop. A weapons deal. That was dangerous in itself, and probably exactly the sort of thing Major Eberbach would consider a top priority. He could see only two possibilities, both of them negative. Either the Major would refuse, probably at the top of his lungs with every insult in the book and some he made up on the spot. The deal would go sour, and he would risk being killed.

The other possibility was even more unsettling to the Earl: in the pursuit of his mission, once convinced it was the only way to achieve his goal, the Major was capable of almost anything. How important was whatever weapon he was dealing for? He was always prepared to give his life—something Eroica was forced to admit was one of the man's great attractions for him—but would he submit to what he appeared to consider "a fate worse than death"?

Carefully controlling his voice, the Earl said, "No, I hadn't heard—but thank you for letting me know, Gian-Maria. Can you tell me any details?"

Ten minutes later, Lord Gloria had his staff assembled. "First, I'm going to go steal that Gainsboro today. Mr. James, you'll be in charge of negotiating the terms of its return with the insurance company."

"Oh, yes, my lord!" cried the young man eagerly.

"Mr. Bonham, get our Leopard tank out of mothballs."

"The tank, m'lord?" his personal equivalent of Montgomery Scott asked doubtfully.

"I want it in working order. Make sure all the repairs have been done correctly. Then transport it to Germany."

"Germany!" exclaimed Mr. James. "B—but...that's where it came from!"

"Well, do you want to consider trading the dirigible, the submarine, or our helicopter?" Eroica asked his shocked associates. "I thought not. Not only do we never use the tank, but it's our most technologically advanced piece of equipment. It's the best bargaining chip we have."

"My lord," Mr. James asked suspiciously, "what do you expect to be bargaining *for*?"

"I'm not quite sure yet," replied Eroica, "but I may need it to protect one very precious backside."

Klaus Heinz von dem Eberbach found himself suspicious at the smoothness with which the prisoner's release went. He took possession of Franz Uger at the top security prison, cuffed him to his left wrist, and proceeded to Berlin by plane, without incident except that they were delayed an hour and a half by stormy weather. In Berlin, however, he had to give up some of his control, and that made him very nervous.

Eberbach and his prisoner were met at the airport by people who knew the arranged password, Hoffman Gantt's men. As they were put in the back of a limousine, the Major slipped a tracking device under the seat—he hoped it would be an unnecessary precaution.

No attempt was made to take Eberbach's magnum nor to remove the handcuffs, but the two hulking guards who sat in the seats facing them were armed to the teeth, and not hampered with cuffs. It was damp and uncomfortable in the back of the car, as it was raining so heavily that even with umbrellas they had all gotten wet. The windows were opaque. As the car started up, the guard opened the bar, offering beer, whiskey, wine, or schnapps. Eberbach refused for both himself and his prisoner. When Uger protested, he snapped, "They might want to drug you, you know! Keep your wits about you. Your people could be buying you back just to punish you for failing your last mission!"

He had the satisfaction of seeing Uger whiten beneath his prison pallor.

"Don't you believe him, Franz," said one of the guards. "You know the boss better'n that."

"Yeah," said Uger with a relieved smile. "I'll just feel a lot better when I'm out of these things," he added, lifting his cuffed right hand, which pulled Eberbach's left wrist up as well.

The Major snatched it down to the seat between them. "Shut up! *I* won't feel better until this deal's over and done with. I don't agree with trading riffraff like you for weapon plans, but those are my orders, so just shut up until it's over!" And he fumbled to light a cigarette.

The two guards chuckled. "Looks to me," said one of them, "as if NATO here don't know what it takes to conclude a deal with Gantt!"

At that, both guards and the prisoner laughed out loud, and Eberbach's most icy stare had only the effect of making them howl like hyenas. What the hell was going on here?

It was difficult to know where to turn his gaze; he couldn't look outside through the opaque windows. Even the glass between their compartment and the driver was obscured. Obviously, Hoffman Gantt didn't know that 13 Ultorstraße was in the NATO files Eberbach had studied.

But...that was deep in the old red light district of West Berlin. Eberbach realized that they were not driving into the city. The noises were wrong; the limo was not weaving from one lane to another as it would in thickening traffic; there were no slowdowns or stops. They were headed *away* from Berlin, not *toward* the city!

But NATO would already know the plans had changed; Eberbach had arranged the stakeout himself. By this time Z would have reported that he had arrived and been picked up at the airport, and V that he had not arrived at 13 Ultorstraße. B would be tailing the limo with the tracking device, keeping NATO informed as to exactly where the Major was.

Half an hour from the airport the car pulled off onto a side road, where Eberbach and Uger were hustled from the limo directly into a mud puddle. One of the guards grabbed Eberbach's arm. While the Major was shaking him off, the limo driver floored it, spraying the NATO officer with mud.

Recognizing diversionary tactics, he felt for his gun—but it was right where it belonged. "I *tried* to pull you out of the way," the burly guard said without much conviction as Eberbach mopped dirty water out of his eyes. His prisoner, he noted, had managed to avoid the worst of it.

Almost immediately, a milk delivery van picked them up and headed in the opposite direction. "The boss don't like nobody following his people," Uger explained succinctly.

They passed B in his nondescript VW a few meters down the road, but he didn't even glance at the milk truck. The limo would probably lead him a merry chase, and it would be some time before he discovered he'd been hoodwinked and NATO headquarters learned that Major Eberbach's whereabouts were unknown.

He should have kept that damn tracking device in his pocket! But he had expected to be searched, and hadn't expected to change cars.

Eberbach tried to see where they were as they pulled out onto the main road again, but they drove only as far as a pulloff, where another opaqued limo waited. The piece of nondescript highway between wet fields of hay was unidentifiable.

The second limousine traveled on what felt like main roads for over two hours, then turned onto a bumpy stretch that continued for another half an hour. Finally they stopped and emerged into twilight at the front of a chateau fully as imposing as Eberbach's own. He could not get a perspective on it, however, so as later to identify it from aerial photographs.

Their limousine was not the only car pulling up. Men and women dressed in an incredible array of costumes were arriving in BMW's and Benzes, Cadillacs and Ferraris, Rolls-Royces and Porsches. Eberbach developed a bad feeling between his shoulder blades.

They were swept in with the crowd, Eberbach deliberately grasping Uger's wrist in fear that his prisoner would be taken from him before he could get the plans for the Red Bear tank. He was acutely aware of being soaked with mud, and indulged in perverse pleasure at tracking it across the magnificent parquet floor.

Wraps were taken by two servants, but of course neither Eberbach nor Uger could take his coat off while they were cuffed together. Everyone seemed to go armed; he saw swords hanging from hips, knives in boot scabbards, brass knuckles worn like jewelry, and firearms of every description.

Their host stood in an archway leading to a large room—the castle's great hall, it appeared, but furnished like a Las Vegas lounge with tiers of tables and banquettes around a central platform heaped with jewel-toned cushions. Hoffman Gantt was a large man, towering half a head over the 6'2" Eberbach. Tree-trunk legs showed bulging muscles through skin-tight trousers tucked into knee-high boots with the wide tops folded down. He wore a red satin shirt with wide sleeves, flamboyant but somehow not ridiculous.

Gantt had broad shoulders, curly brown hair graying at the temples, a swarthy complexion, and a Clark Gable mustache above flashing white teeth. When Eberbach and Uger approached, he cried, "At last! Our guests of honor! Gentlemen, let my butler take you upstairs to freshen up before you join us for supper and entertainment." His eyes looked up and down Eberbach's mud-soaked outfit.

"Business first!" said Eberbach. "I didn't come here for supper and entertainment. If you will show me what you have for me, Herr Gantt, I will turn your... person...over to you and leave you to your evening's frolic."

Gantt laughed heartily at that, and grasped Eberbach's shoulders. Despite the Major's efforts to push him away, he kissed the NATO officer on both cheeks, practically lifting him off his feet to do so. Eberbach was glad of the mud at that moment—the thief made no attempt to hug him close as he said, "Wonderful! I have heard so much about the single-minded Iron Klaus. But I cannot allow my guest to come and go without proper hospitality. Now, go on upstairs. Franz—" he turned to Uger, "—welcome home!"

And as Gantt put out his right hand to the prisoner, Uger easily raised his right hand to meet it, leaving the open handcuff dangling from Eberbach's wrist as he glared in chagrin. That was what those disgusting kisses had been about: distract Eberbach while he unlocked the cuff. Damn bunch of thieves and perverts!

The noise, the laughter, the brilliant moving colors made it impossible for Eberbach to make one of his famous commands noticed. With bad grace, he gave in,

hoping that there really was some honor among thieves, and that he would somehow manage to leave this evening with what he had come for.

Because he needed to empty his bladder, and at heart hated being dirty, Eberbach followed the butler upstairs, amazed to find Uger striding along beside him, saying, "Don't worry—Gantt always keeps his promises. You'll have to earn it, but you will get what you came for."

Earn it? He had *already* complied with his part of the bargain!

The butler showed Eberbach into a bedroom decorated in 18th century elegance. "Your bath is waiting, Sir. I will have your clothing cleaned for you."

"No—just leave it," said the Major.

"The master has taken the liberty of choosing proper attire for you to wear this evening," the butler continued, unperturbed. "If I may say so, he has chosen something extremely becoming."

"No, you may *not* say so!" Eberbach exploded. "Go tell your master to give me what I came for so I can leave!"

"Oh, I am terribly sorry, Sir," the butler replied with perfect equanimity, "but that is not my duty. If you wish to deal, you will have to join in the entertainment. Otherwise, you are free to leave...but without what you came for."

For a moment Eberbach thought the top of his head would explode with the force of his anger. But his mission was at stake. He had already lost Uger. If he returned to Bonn without the plans for the Red Bear tank, it would be the first time he had ever failed to accomplish a mission.

Taking a deep breath, he let it out very slowly. "All right. Tell your master I'll be down as soon as I've had a quick shower." *And put my own clothes back on.*

"Very good, Sir," the butler replied, backing out. Eberbach went immediately into the bathroom and relieved the pressure on his bladder. Then he turned to look for the shower. There was none, but there was a tub full of hot scented water, decadent luxury of the kind that damned Eroica enjoyed. But he was covered with mud—it was even in his hair. He stripped efficiently, placed his gun within easy reach—just in case—and sank into the water.

Huh! No wonder people like the Earl of Gloria were so damned soft! This sort of luxury every day would erode one's backbone. He reached for the only soap available, a disgusting pink rose-scented thing, lathered up, then sank under the water to rinse the vile stuff off. He couldn't get rid of all the rose scent, but at least he was clean.

There were three razors laid out under the mirror. Eberbach rubbed his chin, and studied his five o'clock shadow. Yes, he supposed he needed to shave, too. Funny that his host would think to give him a choice of straight, safety, or electric razor, but not provide a bathrobe. It was steamy in the small room. He peered into the bedroom, saw no one, and opened the door to let the steam out so he could clear the mirror.

Standing naked in front of the small bathroom mirror, focusing on shaving, Eberbach barely noticed the movement behind him. He whirled, feeling more naked without his gun than without clothes.

The thing was, his gun and its holster still lay on the stool near the tub, while his clothes had disappeared from the hook near the door.

"Dammit to fuckin' hell!" he exploded, the slight mellowing of his mood brought on by the bath dissipated in an instant. There was no one in the bedroom. Impossible—unless someone had reached into the bathroom from a secret passageway. Shit! This place was probably riddled with secret passageways!

And whoever had stolen his clothes had undoubtedly had a good view of his bare ass.

Growling, he tromped into the bedroom and examined what there was to wear. Gott in Himmel! Silk underwear! Soft, flowing shirt that looked like something out of the Earl of Gloria's wardrobe! Skin tight trousers that fit so embarrassingly snug over every curve that he couldn't help wondering, who could have obtained such intimate measurements without his knowledge?

It was awful. Almost a whole wall of the bedroom was taken up with a mirror

that showed the spectacle of Iron Klaus dressed like some...joyboy. The shirt had no buttons, and exposed his chest unless he tied the strings at the neckline. Damn! That made him look like G in drag, with the little bows designed to hide his adam's apple.

Gagging at the sight, he told himself firmly that it was his only alternative to going naked, and pulled on the silk socks and high boots that completed the outfit. To his horror, he found that his long hair, unremarkable with his uniform or conservative suit, now completed a picture of perverted decadence.

He couldn't go into that mob downstairs looking like this!

But if he didn't, he would anger the man who held the plans to the Red Bear tank.

Concentrating on his mission, he squared his shoulders, checked his gun to make sure no one had confiscated his ammunition, put it on, and forced himself to walk boldly down the stairs and into the great hall.

Dorian Red Gloria, Earl of Gloria, chose a table as far from the center of the great hall as he could get. Eberbach was here, and he didn't want the Major to see him yet.

He had witnessed Eberbach's entrance, seen the master thief easily distract the volatile officer so as to release his henchman. Now the Major's mission was at stake, but Eroica doubted he had any idea what the actual stakes were. Even for the sake of his mission, was the Major capable of lying back and thinking of NATO?

Not if Eroica had anything to do with it. No one else was going to have Iron Klaus's long-preserved virginity—nor would the Earl want it if it were not given freely and joyously. He wasn't quite sure what he would do here tonight, but it would be anything in his power to prevent the man he loved from being harmed in a way no one else here could possibly comprehend.

As his eyes adjusted to the dim light, the Earl noticed a familiar form off to the other side on a slightly lower tier, but still in the shadowy portion of the banquettes. He knew that hulking, ex-boxer's figure, that bald head. What was Misha the Cub doing here? The only reason Eroica could think of was to steal back the very plans Eberbach had come to obtain.

Lord Gloria had thought himself prepared for anything, but nevertheless his heart skipped a beat when his beloved Major appeared, looking as Eroica had never seen him before. He wore an emerald green silk shirt and tight black trousers that emphasized every curve of the small, neat arse and long, powerful legs. His raven hair caught the light with rainbows. He was breathtaking, and everyone even in that jaded crowd paused to stare.

Eberbach...blushed.

Oh, my love, you have just told everyone here that you are an innocent! Eroica realized. *How they will fight over who will have you—but you are mine, as all the beauty in the world is mine by right.*

Eberbach did not look in Lord Gloria's direction, for one of the servants guided him to Hoffman Gantt's table, and he had to pick his way down the banquettes to the lower tier near the cushioned platform where tonight's performance would take place. Eroica watched in sympathy as the Major avoided the hands that reached toward him, the bodies that attempted to brush against his as he passed. He could not, however, avoid the lascivious stares from both men and women, and his blush became an even darker stain on his fair skin.

I wonder if he would understand my sympathy? I, too, do not like to be stared at or touched by people I do not find attractive. He probably wouldn't believe that I don't want to have sex with 99% of the world population.

If the truth be known, there was at

that moment, and had been for nearly two years now, only one person Eroica wanted to make love to. Even his own staff, he knew, worried that he was no longer "doing it." They didn't understand that it was pointless with anyone but the one he loved.

So tonight he watched from the shadows, sipping at a wine spritzer and nibbling on some fruit and cheese, but not doing justice to the light repast. He watched his love angrily chain smoking despite the urgings of their host to eat and drink.

Eberbach and Gantt held a long conversation, voices pitched too low for anyone else to hear. Gantt, in control, was cheery. Eberbach grew steadily angrier, until finally he got up and started out. Gantt's face showed a flash of annoyance before he reluctantly followed his guest of honor.

"No!" Eberbach insisted. "I will not negotiate anything with you until I see the plans for the Red Bear tank! I don't believe you have them at all, or you've got some fake you know I'll see through at a glance."

Gantt stood in the corridor, hands on hips. "You are the most annoying man I have ever done business with!" he exclaimed. "All right—come on into the study. I'll show you the plans, and then we can get on with the entertainment."

At last.

The plans proved genuine—and enlightening. Eberbach recognized the design enhancements intended to overmatch his beloved Leopard tank, although the extra power and armoring would slow the Red Bear down. The Leopard was fast enough to race on the highway...as Eberbach had done with the one he had ended up losing to that damned Eroica.

The Bear was no match for the Leopard in speed or maneuverability, but it was less vulnerable to heavy artillery. It was important that these plans get to NATO, so the west could design both offensive and defensive weapons as well as strategy against it.

"All right," said Eberbach, folding the papers. "These plans are acceptable. You already have Uger, so our business is concluded. If you will excuse me, I must leave now."

"Oh, no," replied Gantt, taking the plans out of the Major's hands. "I agree that the plans are yours—after you have participated in our evening's entertainment. Come back to the banquet hall now, my dear Major," he said, and thrust the papers back into the safe.

Seething again at having the end of his mission snatched away, Eberbach had no choice but to follow his "host" back to the big room where the "entertainment" had already begun.

Raucous music was playing with a heavy drumbeat to which some of the guests were clapping, while others groped one another on the cushion-strewn banquettes as Gantt and Eberbach picked their way down to their original position. On the center platform, a man and a woman writhed naked, the man behind the woman, caressing her breasts and thrusting them out toward the crowd. Soon he put her down on her knees, entering her from behind as Eberbach averted his eyes. But everywhere he looked, people were engaged in fondling themselves and others.

Obviously this was what was meant by participating in the entertainment. They wouldn't find it very entertaining if he got sick all over them!

Seeking to look at something—anything—rather than writhing sexuality, Eberbach looked up at the higher tiers where there were only shadowy shapes and little or no motion.

To be heard over the throbbing drum

beat, he had to lean close to Gantt to ask, "Who are the people up there—how does one get to be hidden and not participate?"

His host seized the opportunity to put a beefy arm about Eberbach's shoulders. "They are merely observers. You, my beautiful peacekeeper, came here to be a participant."

"Not in this!" the Major protested, shaking off the unwelcome touch.

The thief's huge hand came away filled with Eberbach's magnum: holster, strap, and all. "You won't need this," he said jovially, handing it to where the NATO officer's eyes were unable to follow as it disappeared in the changing light. "We're all friends here, enjoying one another's company. Don't worry, Major, the plans are yours," Gantt breathed into Eberbach's ear. "Relax and enjoy yourself."

"I...am not a congenial man," Eberbach said. "This sort of...entertainment... is not at all to my taste."

"Ah, but you are very much to my taste," Gantt replied, reaching out to stroke the Major's hair.

"Don't do that!" Eberbach growled, slapping the hand away.

Gantt merely chuckled. "Then is that what you prefer?" he asked, gesturing toward the platform, where the athletic couple had been replaced by a woman who was doing a striptease...and in the course of it, revealing weapon after weapon. A garrotte was pulled from her collar, wrapped lightly for a moment about her own throat, and then dropped. Knives came out of either sleeve, a .38 from the folds of her sash and nun-chuks from her left boot. The right boot yielded a throwing star, and when she pulled it off, there were poison darts between her toes.

Eberbach was so fascinated by the armory thus revealed that he ignored the amount of female flesh being exposed. It was only when she was completely nude and still drawing weapons from places he had never realized could conceal anything that he realized to his horror that he was staring at a naked woman.

Gantt clapped him on the back. "So, Major, would you like to perform with our lovely, lively Lily?"

"No!" Eberbach gulped for air. God in Heaven, the man couldn't expect—!

"I would be greatly honored to perform with you,"Gantt said with his convivial smile, but Eberbach saw the threat behind it. "Or perhaps you would prefer to entertain us alone, as Lily just did?"

"I have nothing so...interesting...to offer," Eberbach replied, curbing his fight or flight response only by concentrating passionately on his mission. "Anything I might do would seem inadequate—"

"Then you definitely need a partner!" said Gantt, flinging his huge arm once again around Eberbach's shoulders.

Unable to control the reflex, the Major rudely threw him off. No one treated Klaus Heinz von dem Eberbach this way! "I'm leaving!" he said, getting as far as his knees.

"As you will," Gantt said with a shrug. "Enjoy your walk back to Berlin...if you can find your way. It's too bad you will leave empty-handed."

"Only because you've broken your word!" Eberbach shouted angrily.

The room fell silent, every pair of eyes suddenly fixed on Gantt and Eberbach. "What did you say?" the master thief demanded.

"I said you broke your word. There's supposed to be honor among thieves, but you accepted NATO's bargain to give us... those papers...in exchange for Franz Uger. Uger is free—he's right there, reveling in this filthy so-called entertainment. Now you refuse to keep your part of the bargain."

"Nein, my dear Major," replied the big thief very dangerously. "It is you who fail to observe the rules of hospitality—house rules always obtain. In your home, I would abide by your household rules. All I expect of you is to do the same in mine. It is the most ancient of rules, dating back to the Romans...and you have broken it."

Feeling like a schoolboy being chastised by the headmaster, Eberbach had to fight not to apologize. But he *wasn't* sorry! He was the one insulted here! "The first rule of hospitality," he replied, "is to make your guests feel at home."

"Well, then," Gantt replied, "let's do so! My guests expect pleasure at home—and you will provide that pleasure!" The hulking guards, now dressed in skin-tight striped teeshirts and jeans, moved to either side of Eberbach, one of them casually holding a dagger to his ribs.

Gantt turned to the assembly. "This one's going to be a wild ride, folks. Who wants to try taming NATO's wild leopard?"

There were lots of low exclamations, but at first no one spoke up. Then someone shouted, "You take him, Gantt!"

"Yes," cried the strip-tease woman, Lily, who was in the process of putting herself back together. "You can beat him into submission, and make him enjoy it!"

"Gantt! Gantt! Gantt!" the crowd began, and Eberbach licked dry lips and tried to think, desperate in the sure and certain knowledge that he was about to be raped. And worse: raped before an audience as a form of "entertainment."

Suddenly a voice rang out. "I can make him enjoy it—after all, he is your guest of honor, Herr Gantt. And you all know that *I* won't have to beat him into submission!"

He knew that voice. Looking up toward the shadows again, Eberbach saw his worst nightmare descending into the light, throwing back the hood of a black satin robe to release a wealth of blond curls. It was that damned foppish thief who plagued his most delicate missions: Dorian Red Gloria, Earl of Gloria, known in this den of thieves as the master art thief, Eroica.

"Well, well," said Gantt, "the prodigal son returns. I'd heard rumors of your relationship with this very dangerous man... but I didn't think it could be true. Can you put on a show worthy of this audience?"

"Do you have to ask? My only problem will be to get my very dear Major to cooperate. He has no exhibitionist tendencies whatsoever, you know. A very private man."

By this time, Eroica was on the platform, his lithe form and effeminate features the focus of everyone's attention.

Gantt asked, "Why should I give *you* NATO's sweet ass?"

"Because it *belongs* to me," said Eroica, at the same moment digging an unexpectedly skilled elbow so swiftly into Eberbach's diaphragm that he choked on his protest that his ass belonged to no one but himself.

Meanwhile, Gantt was demanding, "And what do I get out of this?"

"Why, your favorite entertainment, of course...and...this." Eroica pushed back the sleeve of his robe to reveal a gold watch of very old-fashioned design. One of the earliest men's wristwatches from the 1920's, Eberbach guessed.

"My grandfather's Rolex!" Gantt gasped, reaching for it.

Eroica snatched his hand back, saying, "I'm sure the sentimental value is worth it, my old friend and mentor. One sentimental gesture for another?"

After a pause, Gantt nodded. "Agreed. But you'd better put on a damned good show!"

Eroica smiled that damnable, serene, self-confident smile Eberbach had come to hate. Elegantly, he slid the oversized watchband over his slim hand and handed it to Gantt. Then he took Eberbach's reluctant hand, stepped down onto the exhibition platform, and gave a tug.

Overbalanced, the Major was forced onto the platform to keep from falling on his face. The Earl was twirling, smiling, completely at home in the exhibitionist role. Eberbach measured the possibilities of escape, and saw nothing but weapons, weapons everywhere, with only himself and Eroica unarmed.

The blond twirled himself out of the black satin robe, revealing one of his flowing androgynous outfits beneath it, this one of blue silk. Eberbach stood like a block of wood, feeling as helpless as one about to be split into kindling as the Earl draped the black robe over his shoulders. "Follow my lead," Eroica whispered as he buttoned the top button of the robe, leaving the rest of it hanging open.

"Why should I help you rape me?" Eberbach hissed.

Eroica put his arms about him and kissed his cheek, then nuzzled his hair as he

whispered in his ear, "Because I'm the only person in this room willing to *fake* it with you. If we don't put on a good show, it'll end with *both* of us being raped, and probably killed!"

Could he possibly trust this man who claimed to love him, yet who tricked and cheated him at every opportunity?

This man who had saved his life at least twice and his missions even more often?

What did he have to lose?

He didn't want to think about what he had to lose!

Meanwhile, the music had begun again, and Eroica was strutting about, making a big thing out of removing his sash, wiggling it against his backside like a towel, then running it through those damnable blond curls. Finally he tossed it to Gantt, lay down on a heap of cushions, and played for a time with his slippers before kicking them off into the darkness in two different directions.

Then he came back to Eberbach, reached beneath the black robe, and removed his belt—which he also tossed to Gantt. "That one wasn't really yours," he murmured, eyes twinkling at the shared memory of stealing the Major's precious oxhide belt on one of their many encounters. How absurd and innocent that seemed compared to the predicament he now found himself in.

Eroica continued to undress himself flamboyantly, while removing the corresponding items from Eberbach beneath the black robe, giving him at least some protection for his deep sense of modesty. But finally, the blond stood naked, and Eberbach flushed in shame as he forced himself to allow his nemesis to slide his briefs down his legs, and stepped out of them. To his credit, Eroica did not grope him, nor even attempt to peer beneath the robe. His eyes remained steadfastly on the Major's, as if to reassure him, to give him courage to face a test he was unprepared for. Please God, he would rather face a bomb or a gang of terrorists with machine guns!

He shuddered as the thief approached him again, resisting the strong urge to clutch the black robe protectively around him. The audience, he knew, would laugh at him. So he waited, stoically, for the thief to remove his last defense.

Instead, Eroica kissed him.

It was a mere touch of soft, moist lips to tensely closed ones, but it sent twinges of panic through Eberbach. *Ach, mein Gott! I can't go through with this! I cannot stand it! I shall go mad!*

Eroica brought his lips to Eberbach's, wishing desperately that he could change the circumstances of their first kiss, wanting a willing partner, not this reluctant steel automaton.

He breathed in the beloved scent, closing his eyes and trying to pretend the audience was not there. He knew the Major's own smell, which was usually mixed with tobacco and some deodorant shower soap of no aesthetic value. Tonight he smelled of rose perfume—how had Gantt accomplished that, he wondered. Undoubtedly it had something to do with the Major's arrival covered in mud.

But as he kissed the unwilling lips, he smelled something he had never associated with Iron Klaus before, not when facing wolves in Alaska, not when captured by the Russians, not when being shot at or with bombs going off all around them. It was something he had thought the Major was incapable of.

It was the scent of fear.

He moved his kisses across his beloved's face to murmur in his ear again, grasping the thick black hair to cover what he

was doing. "Oh, my love, don't be frightened of me! I love you. I will never hurt you. Trust me—I'll get you through this."

To his horror, he felt Eberbach tremble as he whispered, "I hate this! I don't know how to stand it!"

"Leave it to me," Eroica soothed. "I know how to fake it, all but the kisses. Those have to be real. Please—cooperate with me. For the sake of your mission, Iron Klaus. *Our* mission. I want the western allies to have those plans as much as you do."

And as the Major's mouth opened in surprise, he took the opportunity to kiss it, to invade with searching tongue, to indulge in one of his own fantasies as he cradled his love in his arms and brought him, weak-kneed, to the heaped up cushions.

How does that bugger know my mission? Anger drove out fear and embarrassment as Eberbach found himself being kissed as no one had ever kissed him before. A hot tongue stroked his, sending shocks through his overstressed nervous system.

Then Eroica embraced him again, whispering, "Kiss me back! Klaus, if we don't give these people something more, we're both going to be in deep trouble!"

It was the first time since the day they met that Lord Gloria had had the temerity to use his first name. It shocked him out of his reverie and into the reality of their situation. So far Eroica appeared to be telling the truth: he was trying to make the situation as easy as possible for Eberbach. After all, if the thief hadn't interfered, he might at this moment be being held down by Gantt's henchmen and raped by his erstwhile "host"!

As it was, although he was naked beneath the black satin robe, he was not exposed to the crowd. Eroica had managed that quite deftly. Perhaps he really could trust him to get them through the rest of it.

Swallowing hard, he murmured, "All right. You're the expert," and brought his hands up to tangle them in the profusion of long blond curls. He met the soft mouth almost brutally, thrusting his tongue in, and then not knowing what to do with it.

When the Earl sucked on his tongue, Eberbach almost fainted. The erotic touch was like nothing he had ever experienced, sending flashes of something almost like pain through his body.

Somehow, he had always known it would hurt.

But he was inured to pain. Retrieving his tongue, he waited for Eroica's next move. It wasn't what he expected: so swiftly he couldn't protest, he was laid amidst the cushions, the Earl on top of him! Kissing him again, Eroica worked the front of the robe out from between their bodies, then lifted Eberbach off it far enough to slide it out from under him and toss it aside.

Eberbach gasped, helpless, naked, flesh to flesh with the man he told everyone he hated more than anyone else in the world. At first he was aware of nothing but that fact, furious at himself for his moment of trust, repelled by the even sharper surges of electricity running through his body. Then, slowly, he noticed that he was sunk down among the cushions, everything but his arms and legs hidden from the audience's view by satin pillows, by the Earl's body, or by the profusion of golden curls that now tumbled down around his face.

Lord Gloria was writhing and humping in a most grotesque manner...but his weight was on his knees, and there was a good two inches between their bodies everywhere except where their arms and legs touched. "Kick!" the Earl whispered. "Move, dammit! Try to look as if you're having an experience here!" And then he emitted a loud groaning noise.

Eberbach moved, putting his hands up again. It was easiest to touch the mop of hair—it wasn't flesh. He tugged at it, and Eroica arched back, a look of feigned ecstasy on his face that was almost frightening to behold.

The Earl continued to grunt and groan, between noises whispering, "Make some sounds. We're supposed to be having sex! You don't do that in silence."

You don't? Eberbach tried, emitting the "oof's" with which he had been taught to expend energy when hit or thrown. They punctuated Eroica's groans in a mounting rhythm, faster and higher pitched until the Earl was practically screaming. He stopped, stiffening atop Eberbach and grasping his arms spasmodically. Then, "I'm sorry," he whispered beneath the curtain of hair, "we've got to be convincing, and they won't see anything vital."

Suddenly they were rolling. Eberbach found himself on top of Eroica, caught unawares, his genitals pressing against the thief's. He scrambled to get his knees under him, his gasp of horrified embarrassment quite real. Eroica pulled him down into another kiss, and rolled them over again. "Moan," he whispered. "Kick!"

Too mortified to protest, Eberbach followed instructions. "Now go limp," the Earl told him, and he did that, too.

There was utter silence...followed by thunderous applause. Eroica raised himself on stiffened arms, gave the Major a grin from under the canopy of hair, and whispered, "Who says a man can't fake orgasm!"

Their energetic performance had left them in a trough, the colorful cushions heaped about them. Eroica peered over the pile with an impish smile...and took a bow. Then he asked calmly, "Would someone please toss us our clothes?"

Amidst good natured laughter, their shelter was soon filled with their garments, thrown from all over the hall, wherever the Earl had flung them.

Eberbach tried to hide behind Eroica, difficult to do with spectators on every side, but the Earl continued to do what he could to shelter him at least until he had the silken underwear on. He had never expected to welcome such decadent garments!

Finally tying the shirt closed, he gratefully followed Eroica off the platform. Hoffman Gantt clapped him on the shoulder, saying, "So, all it takes is the right man, does it? I had heard about you two, but I never believed it before this night!"

Trying to control his blush, Eberbach said, "I trust you will now give me what I came for, return my own clothes, and let me leave?"

"But the night is young," Gantt began. "Now that the ice is broken, my guests and I hope to see something a bit more...innovative."

"Master," said Eroica, "Klaus and I see one another so rarely, and you can see that public display makes him most uncomfortable...." A little-boy pout accompanied the statement.

Gantt laughed. "Go on with you, then. Perhaps you will join us another time. Your clothes are in your room, Major, with your weapon. Go change, and meet me in the library."

It took all of Eberbach's self-control to stomp up the stairs at his usual pace instead of running for dear life. Eroica followed him, obviously expecting something....

Although it galled him, the Major gritted out, "Thank you," from between clenched teeth.

"You are entirely welcome," the Earl replied graciously. Then he added, "I would rather it hadn't happened, you know."

That was too much. "Liar!" Eberbach snapped. "You got your kicks, you damn pervert! God dammit, I hope that's the last time I ever see you in my life!" And he darted into his room and slammed the door in the thief's face.

Eroica stood for a moment outside the closed door. It wasn't locked, and even if it had been, he could have been inside in seconds. But he had learned to let the Major cool off. His love had been this angry at him

before—even angrier the time he had stolen the Pope—and had gotten over it. As for the Major's wish never to see him again, he always made it, and it never came true. Their karma was clearly intertwined, and Eroica had no doubts that fate would bring them together again.

Besides, he had work to do, back in the great hall.

As it turned out, he was barely in time to accomplish his self-appointed mission. Misha the Cub was making his way toward the entrance when Eroica entered, wandering toward the KGB agent in an apparently random path. In the darkness, he bumped into the Russian, who muttered, "Get out of my way!" and pushed on out of the room without pausing.

As soon as Misha was out the door, Eroica slipped out and headed in the opposite direction. It wouldn't be long before the Russian missed the item the master thief had purloined in that carefully calculated bump.

The reason he didn't simply go to his own room for his things was that the Russian didn't. What else did Misha the Cub's mission entail? Was Eroica's beloved Major in even more danger than he had thought?

Once alone, Eberbach's knees began to shake. For a moment, he feared he would faint. It had really happened: a hall full of criminals had watched him apparently have sex with that Ero-bugger! How would he ever, ever live it down?

He stank of that pervert's sweat—and God only knew what diseases he might have been exposed to. The creature had had his tongue in his mouth!

Eberbach ran to the bathroom, searching the medicine cabinet for Listerine. There was none, only some effete mouthwash that promised to make his breath sweet, but he gargled with that anyway, stripped, and scrubbed his body with cold water in the empty tub. He still didn't feel clean—wondered if he ever would again—but he had a mission to accomplish.

As promised, his own clothes were in the bedroom, all freshly cleaned, his white shirt starched and ironed. He could smell the dry-cleaning fluid that had taken the mud out of his overcoat, a welcome chemical odor to drown out rose soap and the hated scent of the Earl of Gloria.

Only minutes had passed. Eberbach made certain his gun was still loaded, and forced himself to walk at his usual steady pace down the stairs to Hoffman Gantt's study. Pushing the door open, he gasped.

The safe was open. On the floor under it, amidst strewn papers and bills in a variety of currencies, lay Hoffman Gantt, a nasty bruise forming on his jaw.

The plans for the Red Bear tank, of course, were nowhere to be found.

Eberbach had no doubt who was responsible. Throwing back his head, he roared,

The sound of his name in the Major's unmistakable tones brought the Earl of Gloria into the study at a run. He had been headed that way anyway, to warn their host that something was afoot.

Hoffman Gantt lay unconscious on the floor beneath the open safe.

Eberbach stood over him, bundled up in his layers of clothing again. "All right, Lord Gloria," he demanded, "hand over what you stole this time!"

"You are amazing!" said Eroica with a smile. "I didn't think you knew about it!"

"Who else would steal the plans for the Red Bear tank? You only did it to confront me again, didn't you? Or because you think you can trade them for something? Don't you know by now that these tricks only make me hate you more?"

"Are the plans gone?" Eroica asked in genuine innocence.

"You know they are. You took them! In fact, you probably set this whole episode up just to embarrass me and satisfy your own filthy—"

Eberbach's tirade was interrupted by a loud groan from the man on the floor. "Qoooh, stop shouting! My head is splitting open!"

"You deserve it!" said Eberbach. "Conspiring with this thief to set me up. Turned on you, didn't he? What did he hit you with?"

Gantt pulled himself slowly to his feet, squinting at Eroica. "He didn't hit me," he told Eberbach. "It was one of the other guests—Rifkin, the Russian refugee."

"Big, bald, Olympic boxer?" asked Eroica.

"Big and bald," Gantt agreed, and tested his jaw gingerly as he added, "Sure has a *punch* like an Olympic boxer!"

Eberbach and Eroica said in chorus, "Misha the Cub!"

"Who's Misha the Cub?" Gantt asked.

"KGB," Eberbach said succinctly. Then, to Eroica, "You knew he was here!"

"I saw him earlier," he admitted.

"And didn't tell me!"

"You had enough to worry about."

"Misha stole the plans!"

"Stole them *back*," Eroica corrected. "He sold them to Gantt as bait to get you here."

"I didn't know," said Gantt. "He claimed to be a refugee tank commander who escaped with nothing but those plans."

"Why such a plot?" Eberbach wanted to know.

For answer, Eroica slipped from his pocket the tiny spy camera he had lifted from Misha's inside pocket. "He said he'd get you, Major. How better than with photos of you and me in, shall we say, compromising positions?"

Eberbach went dead pale, but had the presence of mind to open the camera and pull the film from the cartridge, exposing it. "I'd say thank you again," he said, "except that if you hadn't been thinking of your own gratification you'd have exposed Misha before our 'performance' began, and it wouldn't have been necessary!"

Eroica stared at the ungrateful bastard. "What if I had openly challenged him? The man sets little value on human life. What if he'd started shooting in the great hall? I suppose you wouldn't care because these are *my* friends, not yours!"

"All right," Eberbach replied grudgingly. "Where did he go? I have to get those plans."

"Probably out to the car park," said Eroica.

"What?!" demanded Eberbach. "While we're talking, he's getting away!"

"He went out the front door," Eroica explained. "He doesn't know the layout of this place. He doesn't even know where his car is."

"Shit!" responded Eberbach. "Don't you think he knows how to hot wire the nearest car as well as I do?"

Eroica blinked. "But...you and Misha aren't thieves!"

A welcome hint of the Major's rare sense of humor lit the beloved features as he said, "But we *are* both agents!" Then he ordered, "You stay out of this. You've caused enough trouble for one mission!" and stormed out the door.

Eroica shook his head, and spoke, as he so often did, to where his dear Major had been. "I didn't cause the trouble this time, Major. But good luck completing your mission—from Eroica, with love."

Major Eberbach went out the front door, intending to follow the driveway to the car park. Hardly was he out the door, though, than a car came barrelling toward him. He dived out of its way, ran to the car park, and slid behind the wheel of the nearest Benz. The footman who parked it had conveniently left the keys on the visor—perhaps at a gathering like this the guests were philosophical about such things, as they were all undoubtedly equally skilled at car theft.

Fortunately, the rough, winding lane slowed Misha the Cub enough that Eberbach could see his tail lights in the distance as he zoomed through the gates. The KGB agent had taken a Ferrari, and was roaring along at nearly 90kph on the treacherous road. But he was alone, giving Eberbach the advantage: he could shoot ahead, while Misha would have to slow down and turn his head to shoot at the NATO agent. He revved the engine, determined to catch up before the Russian reached the main road.

Eberbach rolled down his window and pulled his weapon, glaring his headlights on high beam at the fleeing Ferrari, hoping to blind the Russian enough to slow him down. He didn't want to hit the gas tank and risk exploding the car, but trying to drive at the same time on an unfamiliar road made it very difficult to shoot out the tires.

He sent the first shot deliberately through the passenger side of the interior. The Russian slowed for a brief moment, then speeded up again on a dangerous twisting curve.

Firing left-handed didn't make it any easier, and Eberbach's next shot, at one of the rear tires, missed. He was regaining control of his steering and preparing to fire again when Misha, negotiating a sharp right turn, suddenly hit the brakes!

The Ferrari skidded sideways and crashed into a tree.

Eberbach hit his own brakes, fighting the inertia of the heavy car to bring it to a squealing stop without crashing. Then he rolled out and, keeping low, ran around the Ferrari to the driver's side.

He expected to see Misha slumped over the wheel. Instead, the car appeared empty. Unbelted, had he gone through the windscreen?

The Ferrari's lights were out. The headlights of the Benz cut two sharp beams through the night, throwing everything else into even deeper darkness.

Unable to get past the impact point of car and tree, Eberbach ran around the back of the Italian car and toward the front on the passenger side—when the world exploded!

He was lifted on the shock wave, and thrown head over heels into the underbrush.

"What was that?" asked Eroica, who was in the castle kitchen, helping Hoffman Gantt apply ice to his bruised jaw.

"An explosion," Gantt said unnecessarily.

"Major!" Eroica gasped, dropped what he was doing, and dashed out.

Stunned, the breath knocked from his lungs, Major Eberbach lay on his back in the damp woods, trying to gather his senses. A

car bomb?

A second explosion, off to his left, told him what he was facing: a mortar!

And he had lost his magnum when he was pitched away from the Ferrari by the blast that destroyed it.

Gott in Himmel! Misha had planted reinforcements in Gantt's woods, in case he had to run for it. Damn cowardly KGB!

His first thought was the Benz, its motor still running, its lights still on. No—too easy a target. He'd be dead before he could put it in reverse.

So he crawled—and was tossed again when another mortar hit within two meters of him.

They had a nightscope! Hopeless as it was, he scrambled behind a thick oak and tried to think. He didn't know where he was—except that it had to be close to the East German border for Misha to have moved that weapon in here.

He seemed to be hidden from the mortar operator for the moment, but if he moved they'd see him and the hunt would be on again.

As if in answer to his thoughts, Misha the Cub called, "You can't escape, Major Eberbach. Give yourself up now, and let me take you back to the Soviet Union. You are a wanted thief there, you know, just like your lover, for stealing that MiG fighter!"

"Go to hell!" Eberbach responded, then had a sudden horror that they might be able to home on his voice.

They couldn't—but they must have got some idea where he was, for another shell struck close enough to shower him with dirt and twigs. He remained where he was. Better they killed him than to spend the rest of his life in a Soviet prison!

"I'll flush you out if I have to burn down the entire forest!" Misha threatened. "Twice you have escaped me, with the help of your catamite, but no more! Now I have you, and the proof that you are a pervert as well. Do you know what they do to homosexuals in the Soviet Union, Major? We will beat your loathsome body into submission, and wash your filthy mind clean with strong lye soap!"

At least, thanks to Eroica, there was no evidence of that sick "performance." But then, the rampant rumors plus Misha's testimony would no doubt be enough to convict him in the travesty that passed for justice behind the iron curtain.

When he did not respond, another mortar round shook the woods...which somehow continued to shake, with a familiar metallic roar. What the—?

Mein Gott! Not just a mortar—they've brought a tank!

It hove up out of the darkness, knocking down small trees in its path. Eberbach peered cautiously from his hiding place and saw it headed straight for the oak that had provided him shelter! *Shit!*

But he was not about to surrender.

He leaped, zig-zagging *toward* the tank, seeking to get into the driver's blind spot and escape behind it. Or—the oldest trick in the book—onto the tank itself, while the operator searched for him in vain.

Oh, damn—*how* did the operator know so quickly what he was doing? The turret swung open to allow direct visual search, and Eberbach dropped as a head appeared.

A head crowned with a profusion of long, blond curls!

"Major! Hurry!"

Fighting hysterical laughter, Eberbach accepted the hand that reached down to him, and was hauled up as a mortar shell crashed harmlessly against the side of what he recognized as his own Leopard tank. He dived head-first into the cramped interior.

Righting himself and brushing off forest debris, he looked at his rescuer in amazement. "You kept it!"

Eroica shrugged. "I thought it might come in handy someday."

This time Eberbach *did* laugh, and the thief joined in. Then the Major said, "You'd better let me operate it, Klutz."

"I'll drive, you shoot," the Earl told him. At the look of skepticism, he added, "So I can't shoot straight. I can *drive* any vehicle ever built!"

As long as it wasn't a ship! But come to think of it, he had seen Eroica operate

cars, trucks, and even helicopters with perfect competence. "All right. Let's roust those commies!"

The Soviet soldiers fired four rounds at the oncoming tank, but it took only one warning shot from the Leopard's gun to make them realize they were far outgunned.

Eroica had quickly gotten the hang of running the Leopard tank, and seen again how the man he loved could love the feel of its formidable strength beneath him—as he had loved the feel of Iron Klaus's strength beneath him earlier, even as he forbid himself to take advantage of it.

But he could take advantage of this moment. Turning on the headlights, he charged the Soviet mortar nest with all the fervor of a knight charging into battle on the jousting field. He rose to his feet, standing shoulder to shoulder with Eberbach, heads out the turret, the wind mingling blond hair and black as they roared their challenge to the enemy.

Misha the Cub stood his ground to the last, even forcing them to duck inside the tank as he aimed his shots at their heads. But even through the scope it made them laugh in unison to see him scramble for his life at the last possible moment, following his subordinates in a mad race out of the woods and across the fields toward the barbed wire that marked the East German border.

They followed the fleeing Russians all the way, laughing in the adrenaline high that was the only true climax the two men had ever shared. They had shared it before, climbing atop a runaway train to disarm a bomb, as captives on a Russian submarine stealing guns to try to escape, as fugitives fleeing the Soviet Union in stolen aircraft. But always before something had spoiled the thrill, Eberbach's reaction when Eroica fell on him on the train, his own when to give them the chance to steal guns he had had to destroy a work of art, and the fact that on their flight back to Alaska they had been separated, the Major in his MiG, Eroica in a helicopter.

This time it was truly shared, so much so that as they stood watching the Russians lose all sense of dignity in their dash for safety, Eroica actually felt Eberbach ...touch him. It was only a brief hand on his shoulder, a military man's gesture of approval, but he felt it to his very heart...and answered in kind by making no response.

As if embarrassed at having melted even that little, Eberbach climbed down and took the controls. "Too bad we don't dare chase them through the border." Then he stiffened, realizing, "Dammit to fuckin' hell! Misha got away with the plans!"

Eroica reached into his pocket, and held out a packet of papers.

Eberbach stared. "You? You *did* steal them?"

"They're not the originals. Gantt made a photocopy. Any good thief would, you know."

Eberbach stared up at the most maddening man he had ever met. Of course any good thief would make a photocopy of something so potentially valuable! He remembered Eroica risking his life jumping from a moving train just to make his own copy of the map to the Vatican vault.

This time it didn't matter; as long as he brought back the design innovations ofthe Red Bear, he had fulfilled his mission.

"Oh, God," he groaned, staring at the blueprints, "that's three."

"Three what?"

"Three time in one night you've saved my ass! I wish you would not make a habit of it."

"I don't mind," his nemesis told him. "I love your arse, and everything that goes with it."

Eberbach gritted his teeth, and to cover fresh embarrassment began driving the tank back toward Gantt's castle. "Thank you for bringing my Leopard back to me."

"Oh, I'm not giving it back," replied the thief. "I came in it and I'll leave in it."

"You brought it back to Germany, where you stole it in the first place," Eberbach reminded him.

"I didn't steal it. I traded it, remember? For that portrait of your ancestor."

"Which you *also* stole!"

"No I didn't. It's still right there in your castle. Would you like to trade it for this tank?" the Earl offered.

"Of course not!" the Major sputtered. "That painting is part of—"

"—a national cultural heritage. I know, I know. But it's beautiful, and you don't appreciate it, so one day I will liberate it again. Meanwhile, you *do* appreciate this tank, so I will let you have it if you will give me one thing."

"What's that?" Eberbach asked suspiciously.

"A kiss," Eroica told him. "In fact, I will accept that as payment in full for everything I've done for you tonight."

"If you think—"

"I think," the Earl replied, "that you are capable of much more than you think you are. I don't want the kind of kisses you gave me earlier this evening. I'll collect when you *want* to kiss me, of your own free will, because you have recognized that you love me."

"That will be never!"

Eroica reached over and brought the tank to a halt. They were back where the two stolen cars blocked the road, the Benz's headlights still piercing the darkness. "Well, then, my dear Major, this is where you get out." He directed the tank's searchlight to a hummock just outside the patch of woods. "There's a nice Soviet mortar you can take home as a souvenir, and a bargaining chip next time NATO has to deal with the Eastern Bloc. That should earn you some points."

"Not as many as your stealing this tank lost me!" Eberbach fumed. But he knew when he was defeated, and was beginning to recognize the only man who could consistently do it. Next time he would turn the tables, save Eroica's worthless hide—

Next time? No, he wanted no next time! What was he thinking of?

To escape from that evil creature who was now beginning to twist his mind, he scrambled out of the tank and went to get the Benz.

"Drive carefully, Major!" Eroica called after him. "Don't worry about the Ferrari. I have good connections with the Italian Mafia. Don Carlotti will believe me when I tell him it was Misha the Cub who wrecked it, and not you. However, I suggest that you give a sincere apology to Herr Goldstein for borrowing his Mercedes, and offer to have it cleaned and any dents removed at NATO expense. After all, you do *live* in Germany!"

Safely back at his castle on London's North Downs, the Leopard tank in the process of being mothballed once again, Dorian Red Gloria, Earl of Gloria, locked himself in his darkroom to develop the roll of film he had slipped out of Misha the Cub's spy camera, replacing it with a fresh roll before giving the camera to Major Eberbach.

After all, he told himself, he had to make certain Misha hadn't played the same trick on him, didn't he? As it turned out, he hadn't.

As the Earl had intended when he orchestrated their performance, the photographs would have done Misha very little good as tools of blackmail. The sequence showed Eberbach fully clothed, and then covered by the black cloak, looking mortified. Then came a series of pictures of Eroica making love...but his partner was merely miscellaneous body parts obscured by the Earl's body, or by his mass of blond hair.

Except for one. Misha had caught a closeup of the moment Eroica had thrown his head back, feigning climax. The Major's face was revealed in naked emotion.

Eroica had had his eyes closed, pretending no one was watching, pretending he was really making love to his beloved Major and that Eberbach was participating joyfully. Thus he had not seen the expression Misha's camera had caught on the Major's face...a picture that Eroica would treasure in his heart for the rest of his life.

For on that naked face framed by disheveled raven hair was a look of astonishment and disbelief, the look of a half-wild injured animal being aided by a human being, not quite able to trust, yet unable to deny what it felt.

He stared, memorizing every line of the beloved face, kissed the still damp print ...and then consigned it to a vat of acid, where it fizzled into nothingness. The other prints and all the negatives followed.

"Your secret is safe with me," said the Earl, "until we meet again my dear Major. One day I will make you look like that again...and more. One day you will give me your kisses freely, and I will make love to you as you so badly need. Until we meet again, my beloved Major. From Eroica, with love."

LOVERS REQUIEM

by Leah Starsky

It lasted only thirty-six hours in all, but the events of those hours had a profound effect on Nick Ryder. He could remember watching that old sentimental movie, it couldn't have set the mood better. What might have been a routine case--escorting a witness safely to court, turned into a nightmare...tinged with passion. He found himself drawn to Renee St. Clair from the moment he saw her standing there. She was a romantic fantasy escape, complete with the knowledge that the brief encounter held no possibility for a future.

Fate played along and they ended up alone together, on the run from the hit men her gangster husband had hired to keep her from testifying against him at his trial. As their rapport grew and they'd begun to talk, Nick discovered himself admitting, although not outright to her, the truth he'd been having such trouble facing...he was in love with Cody. Breaking the rules of the game. What had started out as a haven from the horrors of Vietnam and then continued as loving closeness between best friends, had somehow grown into something much deeper--at least for Nick.

He'd always known he was bisexual and never had any problem with that fact. On the contrary, he felt fortunate in his ability to share love without being limited in his experiences. Always with the belief that he could and would eventually settle down with a good woman. Even if his preference did lean more toward men, he was quite capable of enjoying and loving females. As far as he was concerned, anyone with a choice and brains would opt for a straight life and marriage. Living as a gay man wasn't easy. Why court trouble when you could avoid it?

Cody's was another story. Nick had known from the beginning that Cody was confused, not sure of who he was. His deep desire to 'fit in' with society was a counterpoint to his lifestyle and sexual appetites. It was also clear to Nick that Cody had the potential for more of an inclination toward men than himself, but whether or not he'd ever come to realize that was anyone's guess.

For a time Nick's spirits had lifted, watching Cody, knowing he was predominantly gay and would figure it out for himself one day. But that was before Nick had realized *why* he was being so hopeful... and so jealous of Cody's girlfriends. His optimistic mood hadn't lasted long, and he found himself frustrated, sensitive, and moody. It had gone further than it should've. He was torn between two worlds and an inescapable fact: his feelings for Cody...

Nick was sitting at the table when Cody came down and went over to the coffee pot. He only glanced in Cody's direction briefly, and when he spoke, it was a monotone. "Where's Murray?"

"He went to the cleaners to pick up his suit for the party tonight. He'll be gone for awhile." There was that certain emphasis on the last sentence... Cody poured two cups of coffee, and brought him one. "Wanna talk about it?"

He absently played with his spoon. "There's nothing to talk about."

"I see."

Did he imagine that slight hurt in the voice? Cody knew, had known from the start, as usual. And was understandably surprised by Nick's reluctance to talk about it. They were close, could sense each others' moods.

Nick wondered if the inexplicable guilt he felt had anything to do with his reluctance. "I didn't mean..." He sighed. //Yeah, not to mention the *real* reason I'm upset.//

"It was that dumb movie, I guess. Always have been a romantic sucker."

Cody grinned. Nick couldn't tell whether it was in agreement or disbelief, but he decided to take advantage of the lightened mood. "Not to mention another kind of sucker...anyway, it's too soon. We'll have a nice long talk together when you help me fix up the Mimi."

Cody's eyes changed as if in memory, and Nick could see the hint of violence that he'd glimpsed before, in the chopper after his and Renee's narrow escape from death. It had been a different Cody, almost primitive in his yearning for...revenge?

Cody's eyes softened and he came to sit next to him, putting a hand on his shoulder and squeezing. "I'm here, if you need...anything."

The long draining ordeal had sapped his resistance, he leaned against Cody in gratitude.

Cody's arms slipped around him, pulling him closer in a gesture of comfort. "It's gonna be okay, Nick," he whispered, kissing his cheek lightly.

Under ordinary circumstances, Cody's endearing sweetness would be appreciated, but Nick could feel the tense control in his friend's lean body; a taut wire which craved violent release. He wasn't the only one who'd had a rough night--in reality Cody's may have been worse. Those hours of waiting, not knowing whether Nick was alive or dead. The worry, anxiety and frustration had built up, and the short Rambo stint in the Mimi wasn't enough. Yet Cody would ignore his own needs, offering only gentleness. He knew what form of release Cody needed...and knew suddenly that he wanted to provide it. Whether it was the strange guilt, or self-punishment, he no longer wanted gentleness. Maneuvering the situation, however, would take work.

A strong believer in the direct approach, Nick reached out, turning Cody's head and pulling it toward him until their lips met in a warm and sensuous kiss. The half-expected invading tongue didn't appear, and he realized it wouldn't. That would be against the rules of comfort from a distance. Cody was giving him space--as always. Only space wasn't what Nick wanted now.

Abruptly angry with the rules that were messing up his life, he slid his hand up Cody's leg from knee to groin, while his other arm hooked around his waist to keep him from escaping.

Cody responded to the cue, slipping his own hand inside Nick's shirt to caress his chest, and placing small tender kisses on his mouth.

Nick relaxed, welcoming it. Pressing against the growing bulge in Cody's pants, he noted the groan it caused with satisfaction.

Cody pulled away then, with visible effort. "Nick, are you sure..."

He silence the lips with his own and opened his mouth, inviting Cody's tongue to enter. After a few moments of exploration, he pulled back and stared into his lover's eyes. "Don't you want me?"

The words had the desired effect. Cody's eyes burned with barely- leashed passion. "All...you know I do."

With a shiver of anticipation, he rose and walked slowly into their stateroom, aware of the gaze fastened on his ass. He kept his back to Cody, removing his shirt. Waiting.

Cody came up behind him, pulling him back until his ass was resting against the full crotch. "Nick..." lips breathed into his neck.

He turned in the embrace and began to undress Cody. Once he'd gotten rid of the shirt, his hands went to the zipper. As he removed Cody's pants, he slid down with them, taking the swollen cock into his mouth.

Cody shuddered at the first touch, his organ hardening in response. Nick teased, licking up and down the shaft until the man was moving restlessly. When he gave special attention to a particularly sensitive spot, Cody moaned loudly, the tension of the previous hours obviously intensifying all feeling.

Nick released Cody's cock and stood, fixing his lover with a deep, naked gaze. "I need you...love me."

He noted with satisfaction that he'd pushed all the right buttons. Cody was now on automatic, breath harsh and panting, eyes

glazed. He was pushed down onto the bed, pants nearly ripped off. He spread his legs invitingly. "Go ahead, I know what you need. Take me."

Cody entered him, thrusting deep, and he gave himself over to the power. Wrapping his legs around Cody's waist and riding the storm with him, he welcomed the pain, the fury. Masculine unleashed strength possessed him, thrusting in and out more frantically with the approaching climax.

Cody had fucked him before, but it was always a gentle, loving caress, and Nick was more often the dominant one in their physical relationship. Now, under Cody's control, he understood his sudden desire to submit... This was his moment, his surrender to the man he was in love with. An admission that only he understood.

He could feel the desperation in the body over him as the moment became imminent--and wondered if there was a chance for them after all. Was Cody's concern only that of a loving friend, or was it more? Such a fine line between loving and being in love, and even *he* wasn't sure of the difference, where Cody was concerned.

Cody came convulsively, a yell torn from his throat. He collapsed on top of Nick, face in his neck, spent.

Nick listened to their harsh breathing, enjoying the feel of it where their sweaty chests met. Gradually heartbeats slowed, and reality took on a more sharp edge. He'd come also at one point, but wasn't sure when; the whole thing had already taken on a surreal quality.

He rubbed his friend's back lovingly, and felt Cody's breath catch.

Cody moved to lie beside him, hand propped on an elbow. "I couldn't help...you provoked me..."

Nick saw repentance and bewilderment in Cody's eyes, and gave one of his irresistible smiles. "It's okay. Really. It was something *I* needed, too." His smile widened. "Wasn't half bad, y'know that?" He brushed back a lock of hair from Cody's face, reflecting on the image before him. Looking into that face, he wondered if he could give up women completely for this man. Only time would tell. And would Cody ever be able to get from a man...from Nick, what he could from a woman? Could he hope to meet all his needs?

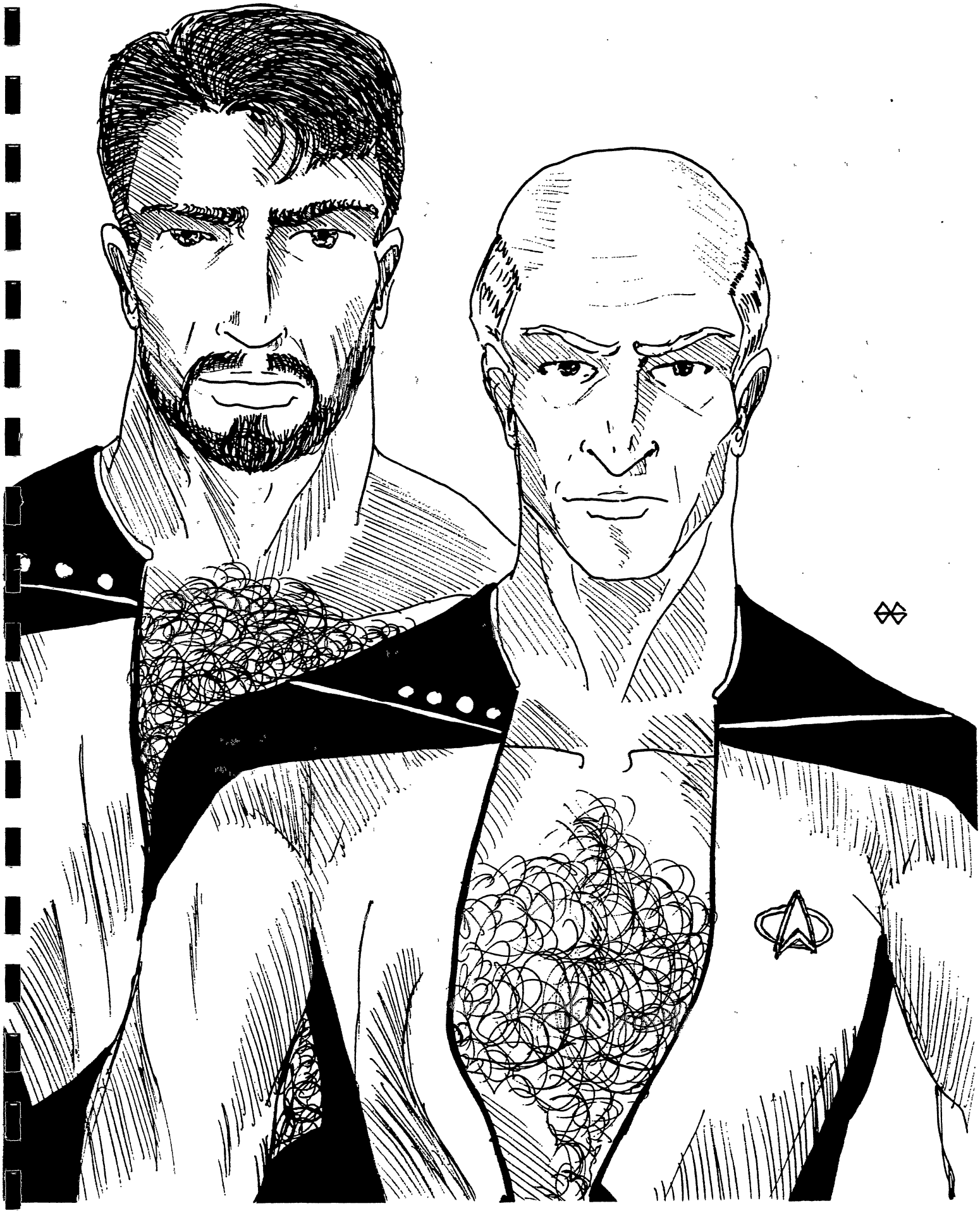
Cody finally smiled, looking relaxed again. "Well, thanks."

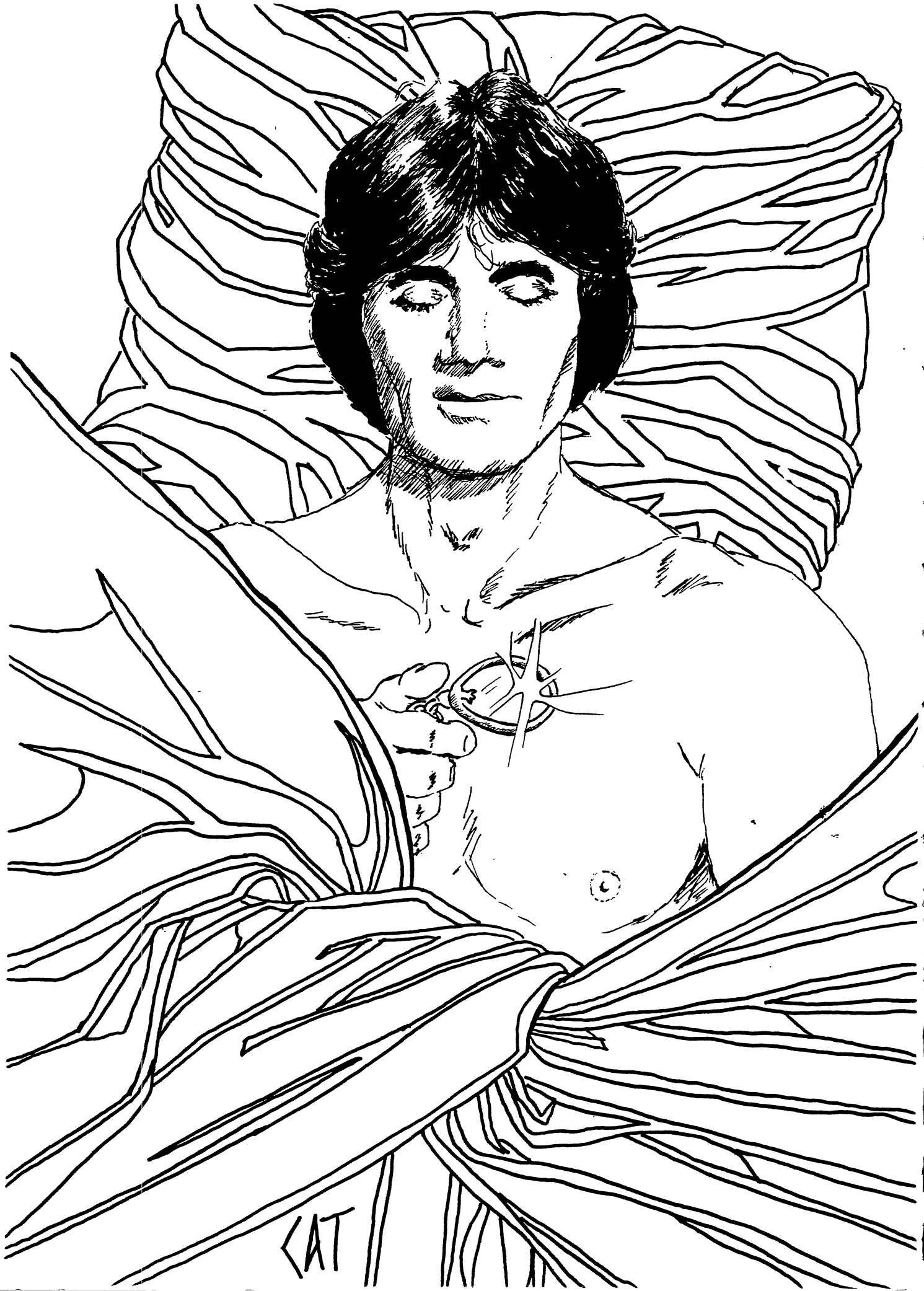
"Thank *you*." He pulled Cody close for a kiss. When they finally parted, both were smiling.

Cody sighed and began to untangle himself. "Let's get ready for the party."

Nick's smile faded slowly. He watched Cody dressing for a time, then got up and began getting ready himself.

* Based on the episode, "Thirty-six Hours 'Til Dawn"




CAT

BlackNight

Crystal quill scratches parchement paper
As the moon goes up, the spell is spun
in further delay, there is danger
in precipitation, certain downfall
Sleep my princeling, dream of glory
of the destruction of fools and the end of your woes
because when you wake up, reality, quite contrary
will have you delivered in the hands of your foe
Magic's my sword, my name is Vector
victor I'll soon be, as you slumber in peace
I'll have my monocle, and you'll have sorrow
shackled naked at the foot of my bed... while *I* sleep.

CAT

"My Own Private...Fantasy"

by "Seamus Cody"

Copyright (c) 1994,1995 "Seamus Cody".

Based on The film: "My Own Private Idaho" (1991, Directed by Gus Van Sant, Rated R)

The setting: The nighttime scene by the campfire, as hustlers Mike Waters (River Phoenix) and Scott Favor (Keanu Reeves) discuss the differences between sex and love. In the original film, these two guys have been friends for several years; while Scott claims to be a predominantly straight bisexual, with Mike the "gay one," I have chosen to tap into Scott's latent reservoir of affection and love for his friend to advance this scene. In real life, this is how I think things might have progressed.

A small fire burned near the two young men, giving off the sweet smoky smell of burning cedar. In the distance, the last faint rays of the setting pink sun were barely visible on the horizon, and the distant hooting of an owl could be heard from time to time.

"You only "love" the people that pay you Mike. It's not really love that you're feeling--it's sex--it's a way to make money."

"I love you Scotty, and you don't pay me."

A long silence.

"There, I said it. I love you, and no one can tell me that it's wrong."

For a while, the sound of crickets and the soft crackling of the fire were the only punctuation in the sudden silence. Mike sighed, and cried softly, rolling onto his side, looking away in shame.

"I can't help it Scotty, it's how I feel. I have for a long time. Sure I started out hustling to make enough to eat, to be able to live somewhere off the street, but deep down, I knew it wasn't just a phase for me. It's how I am, I'm different. Not like you."

Scott gazed sympathetically at his young friend, touched by his sobs and his honesty. Scenes from long ago played over and over in his mind, and he thought about things that might have been.

"Mike, I've known you for years, and never knew how you felt. Why didn't you ever say so before? You can always talk to me."

Pulling the venerable Navaho blanket out of his bedroll, Scott fell to his knees near Mike's sobbing body and stroked his arm. As he drew himself up against his buddy, he pulled the blanket over the two of them and put a reassuring arm around Mike's shoulder.

"It's OK Mike, I'm here for you."

Mike turned toward his friend, and returned his hug. The two lay there, in the flickering light of the fire, enjoying the comfort of each other's arms. Scott stroked Mike's blond hair, and became aware of his labored breathing.

"Mike? What is it? Are you all right?

"It's just...I just...want...want to kiss you? Is that OK?"

As Scott considered the situation, their eyes met, and wordless messages flowed between them. Slowly, the two drew closer, and lips met lips, in a simple kiss of friendship. Then again they kissed, lips parting ever so slightly, tongues furtively touching for the first time. Deep, sensual kisses, born of unrequited longing followed, as conversation faded, and emotions and passion took control.

Mike drew back, and began to toy with the buttons on Scott's faded flannel shirt. One after another he opened them, until it parted, revealing his smooth, muscular chest, nearly hairless, and marred only by a curious scar running down the center of his abdomen from his ribs down to his navel. Mike ran his fingertips along Scott's smooth chest, playing lightly with his nipples, feeling the rise and fall of each breath. Slowly he eased closer to Scott, and teased his nipples with the tip of his tongue, first one, then the other. Scotty moaned softly, and slipped Mike's worn and faded T-shirt up over his head.

For a time, they luxuriated in the wonderful feeling of warmth radiating from bare chest against bare chest, drawing each other close. Hands wandered up and down backs, massaging, consoling, demonstrating a friendship beyond casual. Mike slid his fingertips between the denim of Scotty's 501's and the waistband of his jockeys, wondering if he should dare to

cross this unspoken boundary. When he felt Scott's hand on his, urging him on, he moved more aggressively, pulling open the button fly, revealing the tattered, once-white briefs inside. Slipping the jeans down over Scott's firm buttocks, Mike took stock of his handsome pal, noting with admiration his tanned, fit torso, and muscular thighs.

Scott wriggled out of his 501's, pulling Mike's jeans down as he did so, leaving the two friends clad only in white briefs, half-covered by the scratchy wool blanket. Scott was amazed at how aroused he had become so quickly, feeling his hard-on straining against the thin cotton of his jockeys. Mike rolled on top of him, and he realized Mike was excited too, surprised at the apparent size of his hardness. He ran his hands down inside the elastic waistband of Mike's shorts, feeling his firm, melon-like butt, warm and tight under his roaming hands. In an instant, the jockey shorts were sliding down slender thighs, and his young buddy was naked against him.

As Mike slid forward and straddled his chest, his cock approached Scott's mouth, and he opened it to taste him, for the first time. The pulsing hardness slid easily between his lips, and he sucked deeply, feeling the head press against the back of his throat. While this was not the first cock Scott had sucked, it did feel different--he and Mike had become more like brothers than most friends, and this moment was something he had not been prepared for.

The men he had been with, and the women, had all been somehow detached from realities--part of something outside himself. For all the good life he had enjoyed, Scotty had still not found that special bond, that union between two that transcends lust. Casual friends, casual lays, girlfriends, crushes, sure. But never love. Not yet. This was much more immediate, more visceral, more powerful in so many ways. As Scott lavished Mike's dick with kisses, and tongued his hairless balls, he realized just how happy he was at this moment.

This feeling need not have a name, or a label--it just was. And he was determined to let the feelings flow over him, without resistance. Mike slid off him and nuzzled Scott's chest, licking and kissing the few tiny hairs that surrounded his nipples, lingering over the firmer tissue that made up the narrow scar which beat a path toward his crotch. Mike burrowed his face into the white cotton pouch of Scotty's briefs, soaking the fabric with his saliva till it was nearly transparent. Impatiently, Scott's dick strained the dimensions of his underwear, till at last the head creeped out brazenly over the waistband. Mike's tongue found his dickhead, and Scott gasped with pleasure.

His pal was no amateur cocksucker--this was an artist at work. Mike sucked and nibbled, taking Scott's whole shaft deep into his throat, then flickering his expert tongue over the sensitive nerves under the engorged head. Time after time he brought Scott to the brink, easing off and letting him cool down again and again just before his release seemed imminent. The night was mild, and though the blanket had fallen beside them, neither noticed or minded, their sweaty bodies glistening faintly in the firelight. Scott looked down on his buddy, ministering to his cock with true affection, and let the feelings of pleasure wash over him as he laid back looking at the stars.

Slowly Scotty wriggled around so his head was even with Mike's crotch, and returned the favor, taking his slender cock into his mouth again. There was no urgency to their lovemaking, just an ease borne of years of friendship, and the desire to share pleasure. Scott sucked up and down the hard shaft, tasting the first drops of pre-cum on his tongue, an aphrodisiac driving him onward. Almost without warning Mike's hips began to buck violently, and he drove his rod deep into Scott's receptive mouth. Scott gasped for air as the first jets of hot come washed into his mouth and throat. He tasted the warm salty liquid with some pleasure, not quite sure of the last time he had taken someone in his mouth this way. Spurt after spurt of hot come poured down his throat, till at last Mike's orgasmic contractions subsided. He crawled up toward Scott and the two kissed again, exchanging saliva and semen as their tongues danced together.

"I want to feel you inside me," Mike whispered hoarsely. "I want you to take me, and make me yours."

Spreading the blanket beneath them, Scott positioned Mike on his back, and pushed his knees upward toward his shoulders. His beautiful firm ass raised off the blanket as Mike gripped under his knees, offering his butt to his friend. Scotty lavished his cock and balls with kisses, licking the last traces of come from the head of his softening dick, then trailing down to take his balls into his mouth, first one, then the other, as Mike wriggled with joy. Scotty licked a trail down under Mike's smooth balls toward that sensitive area between his balls and his asshole, lingering to enjoy the masculine, musky scent there. His tongue traced a ring around Mike's eager hole, kissing his cheeks, and flicking in and out of the tight little ring that lay between them.

Concentrating on loosening Mike's tight butthole, Scotty formed his tongue into a tight point and probed against the tight rosebud, wetting it liberally with his spit. Mike squirmed under his attentions, moaning softly. Slowly the ring opened slightly, and Scott felt his tongue enter the dark warm space beyond. His own cock was throbbing in excitement, oozing the juices that would soon smooth his way into his buddy's butt. Drawing closer, he spit into his palm to lube his erection and asked "are you sure you want to do this?" Mike nodded his head in agreement, sighing softly in anticipation.

With more than a little effort, Scott pressed the thick head of his cock past the tight entrance to Mike's ass, cringing a bit when he cried out at the penetration. The two remained absolutely still for a moment, as Mike's tight ass got used to the large shaft that had just begun to fill it. Slowly, looking at Mike for encouragement, Scott eased the full length of his cock into the hot tight chamber. When he felt his balls resting against Mike's ass, he whispered, "it's in--are you OK?"

"Fuck me Scott...I want to feel you deep inside me," Mike groaned, clearly unaccustomed to being fucked, but wanting to savor every moment of this union. Scott slowly withdrew his dick, almost to the flared edge of its head, then slid home, driven crazy by the impossible tightness that surrounded him. Again and again he drove in and out of Mike's butt, feeling his buddy alternately clench and release the muscles of his asshole, milking his cock as it slid in and out. Mike's cock was hard again, victim of the relentless pounding his prostate was taking as Scott's cock nudged it again and again. Pre-cum drooled from Mike's dick, pooling on his belly, and Scott wiped some up and wrapped his slick hand around Mike's dick, pumping it as he fucked.

Sweat dripping onto his pal's smooth chest, Scott drove deeply into Mike, consumed by a passion fanned by years of avoiding such thoughts or actions. Somehow the forbidden thrill of this union of friends excited him all the more, and he quickly approached his peak. Increasing the tempo of his thrusts he milked his buddy's dick with each stroke till once again, Mike began to shoot, into his hand, and all over his chest and stomach. As Mike's load dripped onto his heaving belly, Scott gasped with his own release, pumping his issue deep into Mike's ass, gripped by the involuntary convulsions of orgasm. When at last his orgasm had subsided, he slipped out, and fell onto Mike's heaving body, covering his face and neck with kisses, exhausted by the ferocious lovemaking they had just completed.

Pulling the blanket over them, Scott hushed Mike's attempt to speak with a finger to his lips. "There'll be plenty of time to talk in the morning." As an owl hooted in the distance, with the sound of crickets once again rising to a nighttime crescendo, Mike whispered, "I love you Scott."

"I love you too Mike, I guess I always have," Scott replied softly, conscious of the tears that had begun to well in his eyes. The two friends embraced firmly, and drifted off into a blissful slumber, each wondering what the future might hold, now that this line had been crossed.

[Fade to black]

THE NIGHT OF JUST, WELL, RAPINE

by Jeannie Marie

(A very Missing Scene from "The Night of the Bubbling Death")

Artemus Gordon disappeared into his quarters on the private train that he shared with his Secret Service partner James West. He quickly shut the door behind him and began peeling off his clothes.

He had scrubbed off his makeup and given his hair a thorough washing, along with a quick sponge bath. After three days in the less-than-clean hellhole of the Panhandle Strip, he had craved a cleansing.

And he craved something else.

His libertine tastes were kicking in as they usually did after a dangerous assignment.

First he had watched Jim threatened with Cartwheel's bullwhip, the sharp *crack!* setting his blood racing. Ah, Cartwheel was *not* going to have that pleasure!

So he'd placed his rope around Jim's arms, securely binding him as his special prize in front of the scum of the Strip. They'd escaped and now were going to plot a return to the outlaw town in order to retrieve the stolen copy of the U.S. Constitution.

But first...

He felt the stirring in his groin. Striding to his closet, he opened the secret compartment in the floor and took out a metal box.

As he began removing items, he thought of the second part of their mission.

More danger ahead.

He dressed swiftly, pulling on his boots.

Jim would be hot by now, desiring a visit. He always got that way after a tough assignment.

Ever since their first time together, their libertine tastes usually came out on the edge of danger. Other times were for gentle, respectful lovemaking.

But now his masochistic friend *needed* this. Oh, yes.

He looked at his reflection in the full-length mirror.

He was wearing a costume of his own design, a black leather sleeveless jerkin and matching pants, tight and gleaming. Black leather bracelets reached from wrist to elbow, golden studs winking in the lamplight. Shiny black boots reached up to the knee, a slight built-up heel guaranteeing his continued superiority over Jim in height.

There were accessories, of course. A black shirt with full sleeves for a change-of-pace, but he chose not to wear that tonight. There was a matching belt with a shiny gold buckle and plenty of attachments. He picked up black gloves and tucked them in the back of his belt. Next came the handcuffs and manacles padded with the softest of satin. And, finally, the specially-designed whip that stung but did not tear flesh.

He tapped the handle in his palm, hard enough to sting. Flexing his fingers, he smiled with an evil grace.

One last touch. He ran a comb through damp hair and applied a light dusting of kohl around the eyes. Just enough to accentuate the positive, he thought with a smile.

He left his room, crossing over to Jim's quarters. He considered a sharp rap on the door, but opened it instead.

Jim was sitting on the bed, *sans* shirt and boots. Just those tight pants. Those *marvelously* tight pants.

"James."

He looked up, green eyes lighting with anticipation.

"Artemus."

Artie hit his own thigh with the whip handle, his eyes dark and seductive. He kept up the motion, Jim's eyes drawn to it.

"James, you were very naughty."

"How, Artemus?"

"You let that whipwielder Cartwheel

touch you."

"Of *course* he touched me! He was going to whip me raw!"

Artie tapped Jim's shoulder with the whip handle. Jim slid down off the bed and to his knees, his uplifted face endearingly sweet. He crossed his wrists behind his back. Artie touched his cheek, his fingers running down Jim's jawline.

"My beautiful James, you *know* you're not supposed to allow anyone to touch you."

"But I..."

Artie's fingers gripped Jim's jaw.

"He touched your ass, James. And between your legs."

"Artemus..."

"Did you think I wouldn't see it? Did you think I don't know your little games? Know how you strut around in those tight pants, flaunting yourself? Know how you part your legs for any man who smiles at you?"

"No, Artemus, it's not like that!"

"Isn't it?" Artie tightened his grip fractionally. "You're a tease, James my boy. Wiggling that tight ass of yours, going around with your shirt off, looking at a man with your sly smile and sideways gaze." Artie slid the whip down Jim's chest.

"Please, Artemus..."

"You have to be punished, James."

The blow came with surprising swiftness, Jim's head snapping back. Artie grabbed his hair and tugged."

"You know what you have to do. Do it."

Jim swallowed and positioned himself as Artie unbuttoned his pants. His cock sprang out, waving in front of Jim's face. Jim's tongue slid up and down its hardness, Artie's groans sweet music to his ears. He rubbed his cheek against it and Artie twined his fingers in his hair and pushed him forward.

Jim's mouth took him then, sucking with supreme sweetness. Artie gasped and bucked, the sensations spiraling through his body. Leather creaked and he pressed Jim's face deeper into his groin.

The mouth of his beautiful partner was skillful. He could feel the build-up of his climax fast approaching and he suddenly pulled on Jim's hair.

Jim released his cock and Artie's eyes glittered with pent-up energy.

"Get up on the bed."

Jim quickly obeyed the hoarse command, kneeling as he watched, hands resting on his thighs. His green eyes glowed as he watched Artie approach the bed.

Ah, the glory of the Game. Artie loved it. Ever since he and Jim had discovered their mutual sadomasochistic desires, they had played the Game.

Trust was the name of this Game. All Jim had to do was give the word and Artie would stop... but until and unless he gave that word, Artie was in complete control.

Control over James West was... just... *perfect.*

"Turn sideways and lift your arms."

Jim obeyed, Artie producing manacles from his belt and snapping them around Jim's wrists. He brought his partner's arms up, attaching the chains to hooks in the ceiling.

"Now, let's just peel these pants off."

Artie pulled on Jim's waistband, tugging the fabric down over shapely buttocks. He performed this operation while kneeling close to Jim, molding their bodies together, breathing into his partner's ear. He tossed the pants into a corner.

"You... are... a... work... of... perfection... James."

Jim turned his head, trying to see Artie.

"Tsk, tsk, James. You're being awfully bold." Artie moved back and nudged his lover's shoulder with the whip handle. "Turn around."

Artie's dark-brown eyes glittered, the sight of his partner's perfect body hazing his mind.

Most of their lovemaking was of the romantic/passionate variety, in which both men were equals. But when their peculiar desires ignited, Artie was in complete charge.

And he would relish that authority, in every way.

He raised his arm and brought it down, the whip stinging taut flesh.

Jim's body jerked, his soft groan exciting Artie even more.

"You've been bad, James." Another *crack*!

of the whip. "*Very* bad." *Crack!* "You must be punished." *Crack!*

"Yes," Jim uttered the word softly, his own excitement building.

Artie watched as Jim's skin grew pink, then red. A fine sheen of sweat filmed his lover's body, firm ass quivering at each lash of the whip.

Artie's cock was throbbing with its delayed gratification, his memory of soft lips surrounding it nearly sending him over the edge.

Jim hung from the chains in exhausted splendor. His own cock was showing the effects of the whipping, his body aching for more.

He tilted his head back, his eyes closed. How many times had he been in a similar situation while captured? He had lost count of the times that he had been chained or tied, sometimes half-naked.

Sometimes completely.

His body was a taut image of perfection, sleek and sinewy, waiting for completion.

Oh that ass!

Artie's eyes were hooded as he flicked the whip, the tip lightly stinging Jim's shoulder. He trailed it down Jim's straight back, the silken cord sliding between firm, round buttocks.

Jim sighed, waiting for the pleasure he knew was his to have.

Artie pressed his body close from behind, nuzzling his neck. His hands roamed his beloved's shoulders and chest.

"Now, you're going to get what you deserve," he whispered into Jim's ear.

"Yes, yes!" Jim nearly sobbed.

Artie's hands slid to his partner's hips, his swollen cock pushing between Jim's buttocks. Jim groaned and pushed his hips back, eager for deeper penetration.

Sweat poured down their joined bodies, Jim twisting to impale himself even more, his limbs shuddering with their desires.

Artie's fingers dug into his hips, imprinting his ownership upon pliant flesh. Growling deep in his throat, he thrust harder, tearing a pleasured scream from Jim's throat.

The rhythm was hard and punishing, and each man gloried in it. With a final thrust, Artie burst with passion, his stream of molten fire pouring into Jim and down his legs in liquid sacrifice.

He clung to Jim's limp body, resting his head on the sweaty back and then kissing a strong shoulder.

"What a *good* boy," he murmured, rubbing his cheek against overheated flesh.

"Or a *bad* one," Jim said breathlessly, silvery laughter threading through his voice.

"Quite right, James. Quite right."

Artie gave his lover a quick hug, then drew out of him and buttoned his pants. He slid around the front of Jim and kissed him, firmly and masterfully.

He looked at Jim's glowing eyes. "You love this, don't you?"

Jim nodded, mischief dancing in the emerald orbs. "But not as much as I love *you*."

"Mmm, nice."

Artie curled his leg around Jim's thigh, the leather rubbing against bare skin. He unlocked the chains and the manacled wrists came free. He slid his arms around Jim's torso and brought them both tumbling to the bed, all the while kissing his laughing partner.

A quick flip and Jim was on the bottom, an appropriate position in this situation, Artie thought. They were so closely entwined that nothing short of an artillery shell could have broken them apart.

"Artie."

"Yes?"

"I love you."

Artie looked into shimmering emerald depths and kissed soft lips. "The feeling's *very* mutual."

Jim reached up and touched Artie's dark lashes. "Your eyes are so beautiful." He traced the kohl rimmed around the huge brown eyes. Artie grasped the hand and kissed the wandering fingers.

After several pleasant minutes, Artie lifted himself off Jim. "Much as I would like to continue your... 'punishment'... we *do* have a mission to complete. However, we need a bath first." He lightly spanked Jim. "You know what to do."

Jim nodded, his smile utterly charming as he slid off the bed and left the cabin.

Artie lay on his back, head pillowed on his arms as he smiled up at the ceiling, the chains dangling from the hooks. Ah, yes. A little taste of the libertine never hurt. Well, it *did*, but that only added to the fun!

Several minutes later he heard a soft call and rolled off the bed. Catching up the whip, he strode to the bathroom.

Jim had the tub filled and candles lit, their soft glow suffusing the room. He was kneeling beside the tub, eyes so luminescent that Artie nearly gasped. Keeping up his dominant persona, he stood in front of Jim and curled the whip around his neck.

"Undress me."

Jim obeyed, slowly untying Artie's shirt and sliding the leather off his partner's shoulders. He trailed his fingers down soft, dark chest hair, then turned around and started removing Artie's boots.

Artie enjoyed the view very much. He placed a boot on Jim's backside and pushed.

"Oof!"

"Now there's a good little boy."

Jim wrestled the other boot off and shivered as Artie fan a hand down his buttocks. He turned back to face his partner and removed his belt and unbuttoned his pants, sliding them down and trying to ignore the magnificent evidence of Artie's manhood inches from his face.

He stood up and held out his hand, Artie taking it and stepping into the tub.

"Ahhh! James, you certainly know how to pamper your betters!"

"Of course, Mr. Gordon. I am but a humble servant at your feet."

"Let's keep it that way."

Jim picked up a washcloth and dipped into soapy water, the smell of roses filling the room. Artie swirled his hand around the water.

"Rosewater is a *very* apt choice, James. Especially after I had to endure that pesthole of a Panhandle Strip."

"Not very luxurious there, eh?"

Artie laughed with quicksilver happiness. "Hardly! You, my friend, were the loveliest-looking thing to caress my eyes since I left the train to arrive in that murderous rats' nest. And you smelled so *clean*!" Artie nuzzled Jim's hair. "Strong and proud and beautiful. And all mine." He smiled at Jim. "And after three days, all I wanted to do was drag you off your horse and take you right then and there in the middle of the street."

Jim started washing Artie's chest. "A bit public, don't you think?"

Artie watched Jim's hand. "Oh, I don't think the residents of the Strip would have minded. In fact, they probably would have come out to watch."

"My, Artemus, I never knew you were such an exhibitionist!"

Artie grabbed Jim's arm in a bruising grip. "Ah, but I can do what I like with you, my dear James. Including making love to you in front of all the witnesses we can gather."

Jim's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"You're so beautiful, James."

Artie traced a finger along his beloved's face. He was mesmerized by the green eyes that glowed with their love."

"Yes, I'd like to take you right in front of the White House at high noon. I'd love for the whole world to know just how much I love you."

"I'd like that, Artemus. I'd like that so very much."

*****

Artie buttoned his shirt out in the parlor car. Jim was buttoning his shirt, then reconsidered and took it off.

Why, that little tease! Always walking around with his shirt off. I should punish him again. He felt a stirring in his groin. *Oh, well. Business before pleasure.*

Jim came over to the dining table and looked at the scale model of the stronghold that contained the precious U.S. Constitution. Artie began to expound on the aesthetic, historical and architectural elements of the model, Jim close to him, smelling of rosewater and shampoo.

It was a struggle to keep his mind on the business at hand. He and Jim plotted strategy and then Jim looked at him with that mischievous glint in his green eyes.

Well, that was all there was to it. After this mission, he was going to have to punish this boy again.

They could hardly wait!

BLACK AND WHITE

by Kitty Fisher

Paul Foster slumped back onto his sofa with a weary sigh. The last week had been one of nail-biting tension, too little sleep and a constant anxiety that had only been resolved that morning; a morning that was eight long hours of debriefing ago. Wrung dry of the last dregs of his energy by the intense interrogation that had followed his successful mission, Foster had returned home on auto-pilot, changed out of clothes he never wanted to see again and collapsed in an enervated heap. He should feel happy, or at least content, at the victory. Yet the high cost in terms of lives lost, hardware irreplaceably damaged and morale lowered meant that this victory was almost as hard to bear as a defeat. Still, at least the enemy had eventually backed off, a fact that couldn't be guaranteed these days. Winning was becoming progressively more difficult as the aliens' skill and ingeniousness grew, their knowledge of Earth and humans growing with each encounter, with each mind overtaken.

Despite having gone far too long without sleep, adrenalin still sped around Foster's system. Living with fear, danger and the only half acknowledged dread of being absorbed by the freakish skills and intelligence of the intruders left him drained but incapable of relaxation. Thoughts and ideas milled about his mind, denying the lithe sprawl his limbs had fallen into of their own accord; the metronomic tap of a finger on the arm of the sofa the only outward sign of tension. What he knew he should do was take one of the small blue pills prescribed by the doctor for just such occasions, but stubbornly he wanted to wind down without the artificial benefit of drugs. Especially as tomorrow was an officially sanctioned rest day.

A whole day off. It was becoming a luxury.

Closing his eyes, a frown creasing between his brows, Paul wondered if the commander would be taking a day off too. If Foster was exhausted, then the same and more must be true of Straker. Despite the fact that he liked to pretend he was made of steel, today had seen dark shadows biting into the pale skin under his eyes. Not that anyone could tell him to rest.

With a sigh Paul stretched, trying to work tension out of his muscles. With no luck. Subsiding he stared blankly at the tier of ambient lighting, willing himself to get up and do something useful, even something as banal as some housework, anything that was a world away from S.H.A.D.O and its problems.

He didn't succeed. Half an hour later he was jerked out of a precarious half-sleep peopled with the shadows of horrific dreams by the insistent beep of the telephone. Scrambling to reach the receiver he answered, "Hello?"

"Paul?"

"Commander." Foster found he was breathing shallowly, expectancy banishing sleep and exhaustion alike from his thoughts.

"I wondered if you fancied having dinner tonight?"

Foster swallowed excitement and smiled at the soft drawl. "Yes, I'd love to."

"Great! I'll pick you up in about ten minutes."

"Fine..." Paul went to answer but his words were lost in the dial tone.

Ten minutes. He looked down at the casual clothes he'd changed into. They wouldn't do, not for tonight. He suppressed a grin and headed for the bedroom, already stripping off his tunic, his thoughts skittering past the tricky problem of which suit to wear, onward to the possibilities of what the night might bring. Perhaps Straker would be in the mood for simple, unadulterated sex tonight. Then again, and Paul shivered at the

thought, maybe not.

*****

The restaurant was one of the most expensive in the city. Each table had a pool of privacy around it, the soft lighting and carefully arranged screens meant that conversation was kept totally discreet. Black wood, ivory linen and chrome, all carefully designed and exquisitely placed. The waiters were summoned by the press of a hidden button, no interruptions at all were allowed to disturb the illusion of intimacy granted to the diners.

Swallowing the last mouthful of a very light meal, Paul Foster sat back with a creak of leather as the chair moved with his weight. He stared through his lashes at his companion, trying to absorb every detail of the man seated before him. It was always startling to see Ed Straker dressed entirely in black. For everyday he sported the lighter colours that fashion and his complex cover role demanded, a dark, midnight blue was as close to the richness of this sable that he allowed himself; though Foster had to admit with a flare of admiration that the commander looked good in whatever he wore.

But not as perfect as this.

In the muted light, Straker was a slim, darkly mysterious figure. The tight fitting, high-collared cashmere jacket moulded his fine musculature to perfection; the narrow trousers taut over his long legs. Yet there was little difference here to the Commander's usual style of dress. Certainly not enough to warrant the difficulty Paul Foster seemed to be experiencing in breathing.

That was entirely due to the colour.

The light-absorbing black enhanced everything about Straker, from the strange silver hair that seemed almost luminescent, to the pale, smooth skin and lithe, sensual body. The only feature untouched was the cold eyes; their blue was as remote, as difficult to read as ever. But then Foster was quite aware that the only place they really changed was in the privacy of the bedroom; the commander had himself under too harsh a discipline to allow anything else.

He smiled to himself, starting slightly when Straker asked: "What are you thinking about?"

Foster shrugged. "You."

"I'm duly flattered." Straker sat back, drawling his words, a smile flickering around his own mouth, easing some of the tension that the last week had caused. He waited for the waiter to clear their plates, then lent forward. "But why exactly?"

Foster hesitated, then quirked his lips wryly: "I was thinking that I like it when you wear black."

Straker rested his hand on the tablecloth and spread his fingers, inspecting their long, elegant lines. "I know. But you know why I only wear it sometimes. And I've always given you the choice."

"It was never a choice, you know that; you knew long before I did what I wanted. Even how natural," Paul slowly shook his head, searching for the necessary word, "how... right it would be."

"It's certainly not that."

Paul started, "What? Not right? Don't say that, if it isn't right, then how come I enjoy it so much?"

"Because you are like me, because it gives you a chance to let go, to forget. Besides, you shouldn't confuse something you like doing with something society would find acceptable, they are often very far apart."

"But I still say that doesn't make what we do wrong."

"I don't either. I'm merely reminding you that not everyone thinks the same way."

"You mean at S.H.A.D.O." Paul considered, then looked up through his lashes, suddenly unsure. "Is this a warning?"

Straker shook his head. "No, not about work. I wouldn't be madly keen for what we do to become public knowledge, but it isn't against the law."

"Then what are you saying?"

"I'm saying that despite the liberality of this society, despite the fact that sex between consenting adults in all its forms is supposed to be acceptable, that old prejudices die hard. That discretion is the better part of valour."

"I've no intention of broadcasting what we do to anyone. It's private."

"Good. You might find a few of your

friends reacting differently if they did find out. Not everyone can see that what we do is only a variation of sexuality, a different expression of love."

"More fool them." Paul grinned. "I think everyone should try it."

Straker took a sip of iced water then shook his head. "No, I don't think I'd want everyone to be the same. Meeting someone who feels the same way I do is such a rarity that it lends an added excitement to when it does happen. If I could find a perfect partner in just anybody," his eyes narrowed in amusement, "I don't think it would be quite the same."

Foster bent forward, the movement taking the muted brown of his hair and touching it with bronze where it caught the restaurant's shadowy light. "You know why? Because you're a hunter, it's as simple as that. The day you show signs of being anything else I'll probably faint."

"I think it would take a bit more than that to make you pass out." Straker leant forward and smiled. "In fact I know so..."

The direct stare sent a spike of lust down into Foster's groin. He shifted slightly, swallowing as saliva filled his mouth. Suddenly the nearness of other people was too much. He shivered and said thickly, "Let's go home."

"In a while." Complacent, his eyes smiling wickedly, Straker lounged back, sliding something shiny out of his pocket. "Go and put this on."

Foster stared at the circle of silver that sat so benignly in the elegant palm. After a moment, he reached forward and took it into his own fingers, feeling its weight, feeling that the inside rim was ridged. The circle of metal was smoothly hinged for quick release. "Now?" It was all he could think of to say; his mind and tongue tied by the intensity of his arousal.

"Yes." Straker was watching intently, his attention focused hard on the expressive face before him. When Foster stood up, his hand closed tight on the ring, he relaxed.

"Here?"

"In the men's room: I don't want to scandalise the natives." He almost smiled.

Foster was back within four minutes, his long jacket firmly fastened from top to bottom. Straker was still seated as before, though he'd lit a cigar and his expression was clean of any emotion.

Paul cautiously sat down and waited, his thoughts spinning around Straker; the centre of his universe. Their intimate life was so clear, demarcated in black and white. It was perfectly suited to each of their temperaments. Foster may not have known before Straker that he needed to be mastered, but he was sure now. Sure enough to trust Straker with his life, with his sanity, even with his love.

"Tonight, I want you, all of you. Understand?"

Foster nodded jerkily at Straker's words, the constriction at his groin painful.

There was a silence. Straker watched intently the passage of sensation and emotion over Paul's expressive face. After a moment he asked, with something like a frown in his voice, "What does it feel like?"

Foster closed his eyes, letting his senses feast on the sensation. A slight prickle of sweat dotted his upper lip. When he spoke it was very quietly. "It feels tight, it must be smaller than the last one; I can feel the ridges. It feels as if you're touching me." He shivered in anticipation of the reality to come. "When I move, it gets tighter."

"What you mean is, as you get aroused it gets tighter."

Foster sighed, "Yes."

"Do you like it?"

"It is...delicious." Foster opened his eyes and tried to lean forward, thinking better of it as the metal bit down. "Please, I'd like to go home." Expensive as the restaurant was, there were still other tables, other diners beyond the screens. What he wanted was to be naked, to free his arousal, to be on his knees. Here he couldn't even talk loudly.

"And I'd like a coffee." Straker signalled for a waiter, ordering a cafetiere before muttering for Foster's ears only: "I'm sure the exercise in patience will be good for you."

Paul Foster knew there was no point in arguing - unless the point was to push Straker into doing something like this. He was quite aware that on occasion his subconscious moved in mysterious ways. And most

of those occasions seemed to be when Straker was wearing unrelieved black.

The coffee was curling its steam into the air and they were alone again.

Foster had his body under slightly better control, though the tension in his blood was just as fiery. The simple knowledge of what Straker had planned for later had meant that his cock had stayed part aroused all evening. Locking himself in the men's room he'd had to fight for control in order to obey instructions, taking deep breaths until it was possible to slide the cock-ring on. He knew quite well that giving the presence of a hard-on as an excuse for failure would have got him nowhere with Straker. And despite appearances he didn't court pain. Not all the time, anyway.

As a signal of Straker's intentions, the black clothing was such a simple yet effective idea. Most of the time they met and indulged in pleasant, delicious sex. This abberation from their normal routine had only been introduced by Straker after about six months. Quite why he hadn't seen it coming, Foster wasn't sure. For there was a deep need in Straker to be in control - even in bed. Perhaps especially in bed.

The pale eyes were staring again. Paul deliberately moved until he was sitting very straight, broad shoulders pulled back, gaze lowered, both hands folded neatly into his lap. He didn't need to say a word.

Straker laughed and ignoring the plea poured a cup of the strong coffee, diluting it with a hefty dose of cream. "Drink that."

Foster obeyed, wiping his mouth afterwards on a linen napkin. Then he returned to the posture of waiting.

"When you went to the bathroom did you relieve yourself?"

Foster was momentarily startled by the question, but he shook his head in denial; he'd been too involved in other things to consider the state of his bladder.

"Good. Have another cup."

Wicked, very wicked. Foster smiled in acknowledgement at the mercurial glint in his lover's eyes and took the proffered coffee, drinking it all. Already the pressure of liquid inside his body a discomfort. Wine and coffee. And his cock was hard, the constriction of the tight silver ring distracting. So much for Straker wanting simple sex tonight. Except that for Straker this was simple. Sex and Foster's pain. A simple combination.

Foster sighed, quite happy.

Straker crushed the butt of his cigar into a glass ashtray and signalled for the bill.

*****

Paul Foster's mouth had been the first thing that attracted Straker's sexual interest. It had been just after Paul had fallen prey to the aliens and had tried to kill Straker. They had come into such close proximity then, learning far more about each other then most men learn of their friends in a lifetime, that maybe for the first time they looked at each other as well. It had been the full cupid's bow of Paul's mouth, in its bruised and bloodied promise of unbounded sensuality, that once it had been noticed had proved Straker's undoing. It had taken all the willpower at his disposal to continue that particular conversation. Straker couldn't remember what they had been discussing and he was sure that Foster had been momentarily unnerved by his commander's lack of concentration. It had taken three weeks and remarkably little effort to persuade the colonel into his bed and from the first there had been no doubts as to their compatibility.

Now, a year later, he knew that sensuality intimately. More intimately than he had ever known any person's in all his life - even his wife's - because Foster had given himself totally to his lover. At work he was professional, adept, strong-principled, arrogant. Here in privacy it was different, there was nothing that Straker could do that would incite rebellion or even a question. This was Straker's domain; one he ruled with all the passion that he poured into everything he did.

For Straker, it was almost as if for the first time in his life, the sex was real; the games not really games but soul-deep truth. Even when the sex they indulged in was vanilla it was better than anything he'd previously experienced. And he'd thought himself adept before.

He strolled into the darkly lit bedroom, stripping off his jacket as he walked. Dressed in his skin-tight body-suit he stood in the centre of the room and slowly turned, seeing the wide bed with its satin sheets; the discreet restraints; the water ready by the bed, the lubricant missing. Perfect. He caught a flash of white against the shadows as the bathroom door opened and closed.

Standing there, quite still, was Foster. Apart from the cock-ring he was naked.

Straker took a deep breath and nodded to himself. "Come here."

Serene, aware with every cell in his body of the ritual of this moment, Foster paced slowly across the floor, his feet silent on the deep carpet. At his commander's side he stopped and cautiously raised his eyes, though he didn't look any higher than the smooth curve of Straker's shoulder.

With one hand Straker felt the velvet-sheathed heat of Paul's erect cock. It was smooth, sensual to the touch, dry except for a drop of liquid nestling in the slit. Straker smiled and pressed his palm to the flatness of dark curled belly. Foster breathed in sharply as the need in his bladder became insistent.

Straker smiled, a silver-haired hunter, sloe-eyed with lust.

"Kneel down."

With a whispering sigh of willing submission, Paul knelt.

Straker walked until he could see the whole of the kneeling body. Paul was so beautiful: the clean, strong lines of his body; the honey-tinted skin that reacted so easily to the slightest touch; his face. Praxitelles would have fought to sculpt him; Ganymede would have torn his eyes out. Straker paced around, watching as the inspection increased Foster's arousal, the already hard cock pulsing, lengthening, a pearl of arousal glistening enticingly at the tip.

"What do you want, Paul?"

"To please you, sir."

"Then put these on." He held out his hand, dangling shimmering metal from his fingers.

Paul shuddered, for a moment fighting his own unwilling flesh, then nodded. "Yes, sir." He sounded breathless, though not from running.

Straker could have set the clamps to any tension he felt like; from a light clasp to a pressure so tight as to be almost unbearable, anything was possible. Unknowing, Paul took them, his stomach tight, half wanting, half fearful of their touch. They were warm; Straker must have held them in his hand for a while. The thought made Foster sigh. The devices were linked by a length of fine, supple chain that slipped through his fingers with a metallic whisper. He hesitated, fingers hovering over his breast.

"What do you want, Paul? Do you want me to fasten them for you?"

Foster held his breath, fighting between wanting desperately to be touched, yet knowing how wicked those hands could be - what destruction they could wreak on his self-control. In the end he waited too long and the decision was made for him.

"Stand up."

They were almost of a height, though Paul's naked feet took away some of his advantage. Licking fore-finger and thumb, Straker caught a nipple tight between them and pulled it hard away from the still body. When it was taut, he paused, then clamped the metal down just under the rock hard bud.

Paul gasped out loud, the shock of contact - of pain - flooding through his nerves.

"Too tight?"

"No, sir." There was intense strain in his voice. Paul licked his lips and finally took a breath as the first wave of pain died away. Just as he relaxed the process was repeated on his other nipple.

The pain rose through him and peaked, swiftly translating into sweet pleasure as his cock pulsed with sensation at every beat of his heart. He closed both eyes, giddy, transported. Sweat was already sheening the lightly tanned skin his broad chest and when Straker pulled hard on the linking chain, Paul moaned out loud - the fine line between hurt and arousal blurred, indistinct, lost in a vast, shadowy cavern of need.

"Paul... You're just so damn sexy..." Straker growled, pulling the slightly parted lips to his own, kissing deeply, hungrily, pressing himself to the solid length of his

lover's body, wanting its strength, needing its need. Digging his hands through the soft brown hair, he forced his tongue deep into the eager mouth, sighing as Paul opened his jaw wide, offering all of himself.

When Straker pulled back, his arousal was quite clear through the tight fabric of his clothes.

Efficiently he stripped, then naked came back to stand close to the other man. Very gently he touched the tip of one nipple where it extruded from the clamp. Paul flinched, biting his lip, expecting more.

"What do you want, Paul?"

"To please you, sir." The words came out as a whisper that was echoed by the shiver of metal as the long chain was brushed against his chest.

"No games tonight."

"No, sir." Paul hissed as the hand skimmed down - still linked to the length of chain - barely touching skin as it went.

Straker curled his body around the shivering man, resting his left hand on a curve of arse. With his right he pulled hard on the tight curls of dark pubic hair. Both of them were totally involved, this strange sensuality running wild through both their blood; this knife-edge of desire as familiar as breathing.

When Straker finally touched him, Paul's knees went weak and if it hadn't been for the nearness of the other body he would have fallen. The commander smiled, looking down at the spear of over-heated skin, loving its length, its beauty. The silver ring was constricting, digging viciously into the soft flesh of shaft and balls, engorging it all with blood, making the testicles high and hard within their tight-drawn skin.

It was time. His own erection was almost as painful as the other looked.

Quickly, he snapped open the cock-ring and let it fall to the floor. Paul moaned again as the pulse of fresh blood into his cock made him shiver; the room darkening around him. The release reminded his bladder that it was full, that there were more needs than one at work here and the completeness of the sensation sent him teetering to the edge of orgasm. Knowingly, a thumb dug hard into his glans and orgasm receded, leaving sweat glistening wetly on his skin.

"Go and lie on the bed."

In a trance of desire Paul obeyed, settling himself in the way he knew was preferred; spreading his limbs wide, face pushed into the silk cover, wincing as the scrape of fabric tore at unbearably sensitised nipples, as the burning need to piss throbbed through his erection.

When the bonds were fastened around his wrists and ankles he sighed in relief. When the cool weight of his lover settled against him, he moaned in need, in an agony of desperation, every cell of his body craving the fullness of cock inside his arse. But it wasn't to be yet.

Straker reached underneath the bound man and pulled at his cock until it lay flat to the bed, then he knelt back. The strength of muscle bound firmly for his use set his heart beating fast. The beautiful body caught in perfect tension, skin damp, craving possession, never failed to stagger him with its erotic power. Perfect.

Paul swallowed as Straker's weight left the bed. He wanted to plead that he was too near the edge, that tonight was just right as it was, that all he wanted was to be taken and fucked until he screamed. But the shifting of the bed as the other man resettled himself told him how vain such an attempt would be. Straker was kneeling by his side.

"Look at me."

Wide eyes stared up at him, sweat trickling down the hollow of Paul's cheek.

"I love you."

Foster shivered, his body bow-string taut, his eyes flickering to the length of black leather held so carelessly in Straker's hands. He licked at dry lips and whispered in return, "I love you, sir."

"What do you want?"

"To please you, sir"

"What do you want?" The voice was more insistent.

"For you to beat me." There, it had been said. Foster closed his eyes and knotted his hands into fists around their chains.

"Look at me, Paul."

His eyes opened and widened as Straker bent to gently kiss his lips, tonguing them with a restrained intimacy that reassured

and aroused.

Straker smiled. "I'll fuck you when I've finished."

Foster barely had time to nod before the first blow landed.

Straker worked the crop with easy skill, marking the pale skin with a criss-cross pattern of fire that had Foster writhing, crying out with each successive blow, pressing his nipples still bound by the clamps into the bed, the pain shocking, enlightening.

After a while, his own breath fast and erratic, Straker stopped and rested the sweating palm of his right hand on the curve of arse where he had landed the crop. The underlying muscles trembled at his touch and Paul moaned as the fingers traced each welt across his skin. Straker could see that Paul's cock was still erect, pressed wetly to the sheets. The pain had only enhanced the arousal and it was dark red, swollen. When he ran a nail across the fiery pattern, the shaft pulsed and, impossibly, seemed to lengthen.

Straker almost growled, lust spearing his own cock into the air.Throwing the whip to the floor he slid himself between Foster's outstretched legs, pushing the thighs further apart with his knees.

Paul cried out as Straker sheathed himself in one hard movement. Even though his arse was prepared the possession was still almost too much to bear - Straker's cock long and thick, seemingly too big considering the lightness of his frame. Paul lay still, his bound hands clutching at the sheets, tension knotting his shoulders, pain from his abused skin riding through the arousal.

Then Straker slipped his hands under them both and removed the clamps.

Foster bucked wildly beneath him and called out, the fire of pain ripping through him like a meteor. Flicking hard with his thumb Straker moved again, sliding his cock slowly, feeling the shudders of Foster's body as if the pain were his own.

For a long heart-beat Straker waited. He could feel the urgency in the erratic breaths; in the sweat that slicked both their skins and in the heat that tantalised him. He pressed his hands to the raw nipples, to the curving swell of buttock, pressing until a moan combined of desire and pain was muffled by the sheets. Then, eyes half closed, he let himself slide back inside, savouring the tightness, the heat, pressing deep into responsive flesh.

For Foster, his own need was still there, but it was consumed by this other, by the spear of need that split him in two; fragmenting then remaking him with each stroke. He wanted more than anything to feel the man above him lose control, to sob out loud as he came. To become as abandoned as he was himself. The size of the cock inside him no longer mattered, nor the pain, nor the urgent requirements of his bladder. With a ripple of muscle he pushed back, surprising a gasp of hunger from Straker.

It was all Paul needed. Without any thought for himself he fought for Straker's orgasm, using all his strength to coax the man above him into desperation. Until Straker let loose, pumping hard into the willing flesh. But each stroke battered against tissue made unbearably sensitive, pounding against his bladder until he was shaking, every muscle gripping down hard to stop himself from giving in to the unbearable compulsion. In need he bit down on the cover, tears fighting through tight closed lids as Straker ravaged his body. The sensation was beyond pleasure, sending him into a realm that was ruled by darkness and pain.

Finally, with a shuddering cry the commander lost control, the extreme tightness of bunched muscle around his cock too much. Biting into the softness of skin, Straker came hard, the pulsing sending him deeper into the tight second skin of his lover's body.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself still plastered down the length of well muscled back. There was an agonized moan and Straker knew what had brought him round. He slid the softening length of his cock from Foster's arse and moved to release the bonds at his wrists and ankles.

"Turn over."

Slowly and carefully Foster obeyed. He was wide-eyed with desperation, his cock soft against the skin of his thigh.

"What do you want?"

The answer came out as an uneven croak. "To please you, sir."

"You do that, most certainly you do that." Straker lent forward and kissed the

parted lips very gently until Paul moaned in despair and the kiss was returned. Pulling back, his eyes hooded with the return of desire, Straker nodded. "Stand up and walk to the bathroom."

Foster obeyed, lightheaded with need, unsteady on his feet. At the toilet he stopped and waited, he could hear Straker following.

"Go on, you can have ten seconds."

Ten seconds. It sounded an age. Foster held himself and tried to relax his muscles but they had been tightened for too long, only a trickle of liquid emerged. He groaned aloud in frustration. Straker was counting off the time.

"Nine... Ten... Not long enough or has the urge gone?"

"No! No, sir. I just can't..." He was almost sobbing.

"Yes you can. I'll help..." And two fingers slid their way into the semen soaked tightness of Paul's arse. "Perhaps this will encourage you; when you've pissed, then you can come. Better?"

Paul nodded, not knowing if it was or not but incapable of disagreeing, feeling the return of arousal despite the agony in his gut. He concentrated very hard, knowing that if he got a hard-on back it would be even more difficult. Trying to ignore the skilful fingers as they played so gently inside him, to ignore the tantalising scent of Straker's skin, the animal musk of semen, the pain, to ignore everything but the most basic of needs.

"Go on, I won't tease anymore, you can have as long as you like."

A second hand rested on the flat plane of his belly and pushed. It was too much and with a gasp his body relaxed, liquid streaming into the waiting bowl.

Afterwards, he stood, head down, breathing heavily as a hand reached and pulled his head around. The intensity of the look took his breath away and he fell at his master's feet, mouth searching blindly for the comfort of skin against his mouth. But strong hands forced him onto his feet, pushing him hard against the wall.

"Didn't I tell you it was your turn to come?" Straker waited for a bemused answering nod, then with a wicked laugh fell elegantly to his knees to take Paul's cock into his mouth.

Instantly fully erect, the long arousal combined with the sight of the blond head bent to service him were too much and with a cry Paul shuddered into release. His hands moved holding tight to Straker, forcing himself deep into the accommodating throat, screaming silently as he came.

Slumped against the wall, he blinked sweat out of his eyes and jerkily relaxed his grip on the kneeling man. Almost in wonder he stroked the sweat damp hair.

Letting the softening cock slide from his lips, Straker rested his cheek against the damp prickle of darkly curling hair at Foster's groin. He sighed, quite happy.

"Why?" Paul let the silky, ice-white hair slide through his fingers, the feel sensuous, hypnotic, fascinating.

"Because I love you."

"But..."

"But what? It's not as if I've never done that before."

"No, but not when we're in the middle of a scene, not when you're..."

"Topping you? No, I suppose I haven't." Straker sighed and closed his eyes, breathing in the strong scent of masculinity.

"Then why?"

"You're so damned persistent. Okay, I felt like swapping roles with you, I wanted to feel what you feel for once."

Paul swallowed while his thought tried to deal with this information in a coherent way. In the end he could only croak, "For once?"

Straker opened his eyes and pushed away from the support of Paul's legs. He knelt very still, acknowledging the importance of the moment, then shook his head. "No, not just the once, but I don't know how often. Don't even know if I'll like it."

"Yet you want to try."

"Yeah, why not?" He smiled and stood up. "Turn around."

"Sometimes, having a conversation with you is like talking to the mist." Paul sighed but obeyed.

Straker examined the welted skin. "I'll put some cream on these after you've showered."

Paul nodded, his skin burned and he knew that it would need something on it before he could sleep, but as an issue it was far less important than their other topic of conversation. He turned around.

"And these." Straker lightly touched the sore looking nipples. He tutted at Paul's sigh of frustration. "So, I feel like trying out something a bit different..."

"Very different..."

"No, not as different as you think. But I don't think it's going to be today." He kissed Paul lightly on the lips and walked into the bedroom, oblivious to the consternation left in his wake. "Come to bed for a bit before you shower."

Paul obeyed, despite the fact that he'd have been glad of the interruption. He was unsure of his reaction to Straker's words. Unsure if he'd be up to whatever Straker might need of him. Unsure if he approved of the searing arousal that had burned him on realisation of what Straker planned.

Silver hair bright against the dark pillows, Straker was a relaxed sprawl under the sheets. Foster slipped in beside him, taking the lighter body into his arms, wrapping them together in the way that was right.

Straker curled against him, arm heavy across Foster's chest, fingers contentedly stroking the inch or so of skin they could reach. He shifted his head on the heavy muscle of Paul's shoulder and peered at the sensual face, seeing the eyes already half-closed, sleepy. Straker yawned and asked, "Are you all right? Not too sore?"

"No, I'm fine." And he was, the aches and pains were nothing to the overwhelming sense of peace that weighted his limbs. Even Straker's statement was pushed to the back of his mind, not important enough to disturb his serenity. It was always the same. Here in this bed, with his lover wrapped so trustingly in his arms, Paul Foster had found the essential peace that had eluded him all his life. Nothing else mattered, not here. And if what was needed to keep this was a reversal of their roles, then so be it - after all, he'd had a good teacher.

"I love you, Commander Straker."

"I know." The words were muffled, their speaker almost asleep.

Foster smiled gently into the air and spoke the voice command that turned off the lights. In darkness he waited, the edge of pain dulled by his love, the discomfort of cold semen seeping from his body ignored. Straker liked to be held after they'd made love. So held he was. It was the least Foster could do.

For Melanie, who could probably talk me into writing anything if she tried hard enough.

STORM WARNINGS

by Flamingo

Author's note: Reference episodes for this story are the two-part *GOLDEN TRIANGLE* and *BUSHIDO.*

This one's for Rosemary.

Listen to the warning
The seer he said
Beware the storm that gathers here
Listen to the wise man.

The Prophet's Song -- Queen

"*Castillo!*" Ricardo Tubbs yelped incredulously. He pushed up the straw hat that was keeping the punishing Miami sun out of his handsome light eyes and stared at his partner. His grip tightened on his fishing rod so hard it made the line dangling over the side of the yacht jerk wildly. "*Martin* Castillo? As in *Lieutenant* Martin Castillo, as in monosyllabic, humorless, 'don't-you-ever-come-up-to-my-face-like-that-again' Castillo?" He blinked, but not from the bright, mid-day light. "You got a sudden death wish, partner?"

The only response from the black Vice cop's laid-back friend was a confident, if somewhat evil, chuckle.

The two men were taking a brief sojourn from the crazed high-wire act that was their day to day career. Undercover cops for Metro-Dade's Organized Crime Bureau, Ricardo Tubbs -- late from New York -- and James Sonny Crockett -- a local boy with a love of danger -- had decided to take Sonny's forty-two foot Endeavor yacht, the *St. Vitus Dance,* for a weekend cruise. After anchoring the boat off a remote Keye, all they'd done for the last twenty-four hours was fish, drink beer, and be sinfully lazy, totally enjoying the first truly free weekend they'd had in over a month.

Tubbs' partner lay sprawled with a casual grace across the bow of the anchored boat, a fishing pole comfortably braced against his side. Wearing nothing but a dazzling white bikini swim suit, the Anglo labored effortlessly to improve what Tubbs had to admit was already the perfect tan. The sailboat was Sonny's home, even though, as confiscated property, it was actually owned by the Metro Dade Police Department. For the last twelve years it had served as Crockett's base of operations for his undercover identity, Sonny Burnett.

Crockett's pole jumped, making the Floridian open one eye, but when he realized his prey had only hit and run, he let his lids droop lazily again. His pet alligator suddenly let out a throaty grumble, as if agreeing with Tubbs' aggrieved tone.

"See?" Rico said argumentatively as he shifted irritably in his deck chair. "Even Elvis thinks you're crazy."

Crockett reached over and slapped the reptile's hide affectionately. Rico's eyes widened as the eight foot long monster slid over to his master and cuddled up against him like a faithful hound.

"Bet you a bottle of Dom Perignon," Crockett drawled, grinning.

"Uh-uh," Tubbs swore, pulling his hat back down. "I don't want to be involved, man. I'm not the kind of guy who yells at suicides to jump. I ain't about to encourage you."

Crockett chortled again and the sound chilled Tubbs' blood. It was the same evil laugh Sonny always used as Burnett when he

was really working the charm, lining the bad guys up for the big fall.

"I'm gonna do it whether you take the bet or not, pal," the blond cop assured his darker partner, as he scratched one of Elvis' eye ridges. "The question is, will I succeed? Could be a free bottle of fine champagne in it for you."

"Don't give me that," Tubbs grumbled. "You're tryin' to pull me in as an accessory. Remember, Mrs. Tubbs' favorite son grew up in N'Yawk, not on some *southern* cabbage farm."

Crockett really laughed then, enjoying himself.

"I'll tell you what the real question is, Sonny. The real question is what put this wildest of wild hairs up your ass?"

The blond cop sat up on the gleaming deck, contemplating his answer. Finally, he shrugged. "I don't know. Lotta things. Too many questions unanswered. Too many loose ends. All that business with his ex-wife, May Ying. Does everything he can to save her life *and* her current husband's, and then puts her on a plane and never says another thing about it. Like it didn't happen. Then this last business about Gretsky...."

Tubbs nodded, remembering. Castillo was one strange dude, that was true, but the incident with the ex-CIA double agent Jack Gretsky was right off the weirdness meter.

"You saw his face when he first recognized that spook on the surveillance tape," Sonny said. "His eyes got so misty I thought he was gonna cry right there in the strategy room. I had to argue him into the ground to use back-up -- "

"Which he never agreed to," Tubbs interrupted.

"Right. We had to sneak around after him just to cover his back! Then, Gretsky forces Marty to kill him -- "

"A mercy killing, plain and simple," Tubbs added.

"Exactly. Dude was dyin' of cancer, so what does he do? Finds Marty, hands over his wife and kid to the lieutenant's safe keeping, then forces Marty to whack him. Now, just what kind of history do you think we're dealin' with between those two men?"

Tubbs shook his head. He was not about to begin speculating on the nature of relationships Castillo might have formed living undercover in a country as alien as Thailand. The incident with Gretsky had been over two months ago. Castillo had been hospitalized, then needed recovery time after that, but he'd been back at his desk for the last six weeks, if looking a little tired and grey. In fact, Tubbs swore, Castillo seemed different after the whole Gretsky thing. Like he'd lost something really important. He'd recovered much more quickly, at least on the surface, after the incident with his ex-wife.

"And he hasn't been the same since," Sonny continued, really warming up to his subject. "I'll tell you what I think. I think that in Southeast Asia those two very bad dudes were lovers -- and I'm not talkin' fuck-buddies, either. I don't know whether May Ying came between them, or showed up after Gretsky split -- or was *dumped* -- or if she was nothing more than a cover relationship -- *but* I think those two guys had it bad for each other. I think they had something together that neither of them ever really got over."

Tubbs mulled that over. Sonny could make some pretty big leaps when he didn't have enough information, but more often than not he was right. He had positively uncanny instincts, that was for sure. He recalled that bizarre meeting in the strategy room after Gretsky had interfered with their bust, killed the dealer, and stolen five hundred thousand in cash.

Castillo had *ordered* them to keep their distance from the rogue agent. "To a man like this, death is a profession," he'd said.

Rico had to shake his head. "Castillo gettin' it on with a *professional* assassin? I don't know...."

"It wasn't just sex, man," Sonny insisted. "It was deeper than that. You're the one that got the coroner's report, you told me about it. Gretsky was dyin' of cancer. They couldn't see how he was even able to *function* -- but he kept it together enough to come back, make contact with Marty -- then *force* Castillo to kill him." Sonny paused and looked out over the water. "He's still dealin' with it, too. I can tell."

The New Yorker pondered that and suspected Sonny was right. At the time he'd been a lot more concerned with his partner's reaction to Gretsky's appearance than the lieutenant's. Crockett wouldn't leave it alone, pursuing Castillo through the whole weird thing, in spite of the note *Martin* had left for Sonny telling him politely to stay out of it. And that note had been for *Sonny* -- no one else. Rico grew even more troubled. Could his reckless partner really be on to something about the man in black?

"Too many unanswered questions," Sonny reiterated. He focused on Tubbs again. "Aren't you even curious, man?" Tubbs realized he was talking about the bet again. "Don't you wonder how this might turn out? Come on, pal, where's your sense of *adventure?*"

He just continued to shake his head. "Hey, pal, why don't you just do something a little less dangerous -- like stroll around the lion house at the Miami Zoo wearing nothing but raw steak?"

"Tsk-tsk-tsk," Crockett scolded. "No soul for risk. No imagination. To think I call this man my partner. Good thing you got me, Tubbs. I'm the only thing standing between you and hardening of the arteries."

"And I'm beginning to think I'm the only thing standing between you and an early dismissal," Tubbs warned, his voice growing serious. "He's your *lieutenant.* He could can you, man. He could *bust* you."

"His *best* detective?" Crockett asked in shocked voice, then roared with laughter when Rico rolled his eyes. "It ain't happenin'. Not over somethin' like that. Not if I'm... discreet."

Rico looked away. "You're playin' with fire, pal. Castillo is the most *serious* dude I've ever met. When he walks into a room, it's like a storm gathering. We're talking about a man who -- if you are right -- was able to turn his back on his ex-wife *and* shoot his ex-lover to death. I'm tellin' you, this is *not* one of your best ideas."

"You have no faith in me, partner," Sonny protested, his voice dripping pained feelings. "You don't think I can do it."

Rico paused, carefully considering his response. "I believe you can *try.* I believe you *will,* now that the idea has settled itself in your weak, tiny, focused little brain. But succeed? Now, that I can't see. Not with him. Not with Castillo."

Sonny stared at his partner, genuinely hurt. "You really don't believe in me. You don't think I'm capable of *seducing* Martin Castillo. Some partner! Some pal! Come on, Rico -- have you ever seen me fail?"

The darker man suddenly felt a chill run up his spine in spite of the blistering sun. *That's the part that scares me,* he thought. The truth was, no, he'd never seen Sonny fail once he'd "targeted" an object of lust, male or female. That was part of his problem, Tubbs felt. He was overconfident.

The New Yorker turned to face the blond. "Not this time. I've seen you pull some wild ones, true. Seen you charm some women *way* outta your league, and nail some serious dudes I'd have thought would've punched your lights out at the very suggestion. But not him. Uh-uh."

"Sounds like a challenge," Crockett murmured naughtily, his green eyes glinting.

Rico stared back at his friend, genuinely worried. "Listen, Sonny, I'm being serious. You've been pushin' the envelope on this subject ever since you lost Caroline. You act like spending a night alone in bed is against the law. But I don't believe for one moment you've been tryin' to win a gold medal in this decade's Sex Olympics. The only reason you're doin' all this crazy runnin' around is because you're lookin' for love. You haven't had a minute of love, just wild sex, insane passion, but not one instance of genuine emotion since your wife divorced you. I know that, I've known it all along, and I've kept waitin' for you to find it -- some real love, real feeling -- so you'd settle down before you did something that might get you killed. And now you've got your eye set on one of the baddest dudes in South Florida. I am tellin' you, man, *don't do this.* It's gonna lead to trouble, more trouble than you can handle!"

The darker man could see that his partner had tuned him out the minute he'd mentioned his ex-wife's name. The Anglo only held up his hands and quipped, "No guts, no glory." Then he tried to mollify his

exasperated friend by saying, "Lighten up, my *man*. I'll be cool. I'll take it slow, and back off when I need to... but I *will* succeed."

Tubbs sighed and tried a different tactic. "I would've never picked Castillo as your type."

That made Sonny pause, but finally he said, "Actually... he's not. He's *Burnett's* type."

That was the *last* thing Tubbs wanted to hear, and he was genuinely sorry he'd brought it up. There were times when Sonny's undercover personae got entirely too close to the surface. Burnett could be brutal, an uncaring, selfish sadist, and Sonny had to work to keep him in his place. Crockett had confessed shortly after his divorce that Burnett had certainly been a contributing factor in the failure of his marriage. It was Burnett who was always getting Crockett in trouble, sexually. If *Burnett* was fueling this interest in the sexual conquest of Martin Castillo, Tubbs knew he'd have little chance to talk Sonny out of it.

"So what makes you think Castillo will have any interest in *you* or Burnett?" Tubbs asked out of morbid curiosity.

"Oh, there's somethin' there," Crockett informed him confidently. "There's always been somethin' there. Even you have to admit you've seen it. Specially when that deal with Gretsky went down...."

Rico remembered that much too clearly. That terrible moment in the temple, with Castillo's gun still smoking, and his friend dead at his feet. He'd never seen an expression like that on any man's face.

Then Crockett had gone up to him after the federal agents tailing Castillo had taken Gretsky's body away and asked, "What do you want me to do?"

Crockett had been wired, the nervous energy rolling off him in waves.

Castillo had merely shaken his head and murmured, "Nothing. Nothing." But then he'd pulled his eyes away from the trail of blood Gretsky's body had left behind and *looked* at Sonny, and they'd exchanged this long, weighty stare. Tubbs shut his eyes. Could Sonny be right?

No. No. Not with Castillo. *This damned fool cracker's gonna get himself killed.*

"...and there are times, man, when I know he's *watchin'* me," Sonny was going on, as Tubbs brought himself back to the conversation. "I can *feel* him starin' at me, watchin' what I'm up to. And anyway, there's just something about him. All that tight control. That inscrutable mystery. I just -- " he clenched a fist, grinning ferally, "just gotta get inside, see what's in that fortress. Just cause it's there. And I *will*. I will seduce Martin Castillo. Last chance to take my bet."

Tubbs looked over the placid water, sensing the futility of his arguments. "Crockett, you know I don't gamble."

Sonny chortled again, sounding even more like Burnett. Rico knew it was useless to argue with him when he got like this. It no longer mattered what put the bee in Crockett's bonnet about Castillo, Tubbs sensed disaster. Sonny was hardly a stranger to courting men -- the Southerner was attracted to *people*, male or female, and Tubbs had learned the more exotic, the more attracted he got. Rico should've anticipated this growing interest in their grim-faced, taciturn lieutenant would sooner or later manifest itself in sexual desire. Sooner or later, Crockett filtered most of his emotions through his testicles.

"Okay," Tubbs said softly, "now you're after Castillo. But tell me, man -- once you get him, then what are you gonna do with him?"

Sonny paused, suddenly hesitant. Finally, he shrugged. "Cross that bridge when I come to it, pal. First things first."

Elvis rumbled again and Tubbs couldn't help but feel that it presaged something ominous.

*****

If you feel it, do it,
You don't need a reason
For all you know/it could be good for you

I'm Not Moving -- Phil Collins

Three weeks later, Sonny leaned back in his chair and stared at his partner across their face-to-face desks. "I told you you should've taken me up on that bet, Rico. If you had, you'd be popping the cork on a free

bottle of Dom P' when you and your lady accidentally-on-purpose end up at your place tonight."

Rico grinned as he stacked the completed files on his desk. "That's all right, partner. Domestic works well enough when the company's right. Does this mean you're finally giving up on the impossible dream? The indomitable Sonny Crockett admits defeat?"

Crockett snorted ruefully. "Hey, you *wished* failure on me, man, and don't think I'm gonna forget it." He glanced quickly over his shoulder towards Castillo's office, wanting to assure himself his lieutenant was occupied well out of ear shot. Seeing Marty moving around in there, he stood and leaned far over his desk to murmur confidentially, "The guy is either being deliberately obtuse or -- "

"Don't tell me he's somehow immune to all that Crockett charm?" Rico laughed delightedly at Sonny's wry expression.

"Mmmm," Crockett murmured irritably as he sat back down. "Can't understand it, Tubbs. I pulled out all the stops. I've been gracious. Charming. Even cute. Nada. This guy must have a glacier for a heart." Sonny sighed, almost depressed. "It's enough to dampen a man's faith in himself!"

"If you ask me, buddy," Tubbs said sincerely, "you got off lucky. Go find some smaller fish to fry. Something a little safer." He glanced at his watch. "My lady's waitin' on me. I'd better run." The copper eyes twinkled mischievously. "Too bad you've spent all this time spinning your wheels. Tough luck not havin' a warm squeeze on a Friday night. But, hey, I heard Izzy wasn't doin' anything. Or maybe you could try some of that Crockett charm on Switek -- see if you've still got the touch." He burst into laughter at Sonny's stricken expression.

"Cute, Rico, real cute," Sonny snarled through his teeth, then grinned wickedly. "Better keep an eye on that lady of yours. Stan told me she threatened to double her rates next time she had to put up with a wise guy."

Rico pointed a finger at Crockett and continued laughing as he sauntered out of the OCB squad room.

Crockett sighed as he watched his partner leave. Rico was right. Sonny was high and dry for the night -- hell, for that matter, the whole weekend! And it was shaping up to be a quiet weekend, too. The entire department seemed to be in between cases, everyone shuffling paper work and catching up on old reports. He glanced about the room, finally noticing the odd silence. He was the only cop still remaining.

Glancing at the file still open on his desk, he flipped it shut. It could wait till Monday. He might as well follow Rico's example and get a jump start on the evening. Maybe if he hit *Raoul's* he might luck into something yet. He stood and pulled his linen jacket off the chair.

"Crockett?"

The raspy voice grabbed his attention just as he slid one arm into the coat. Castillo was standing in his office doorway, a file in his hand. The lieutenant glanced at his watch, then looked around the deserted room as if only now realizing the time.

"Yeah, Marty?" Sonny asked, sliding his other arm into the jacket and shrugging it in place over his holster. He hoped Castillo wasn't thinking of sending him out on assignment *now.*

The dark-suited man looked troubled and checked his watch again. "I wanted to discuss this report with you, but -- it's late." He looked at Sonny oddly.

Crockett shrugged. "You hungry? Wanna discuss it over dinner?"

Castillo nodded, seeming pleased at the practical suggestion.

Burnett chuckled softly in Sonny's ear. "Fine with me, pal. I don't mind combining business with pleasure."

The lieutenant seemed indifferent to the remark as he joined the Anglo.

"We can take the Ferrari," Crockett offered.

The lieutenant shook his head as they left the squad room. "We'll go separately. I'll be coming back to the office."

Is that right? Burnett mused. "Come on, Marty. Let me drive you. I'll bring you back to OCB when we're done. Besides, when we're finished hashing out this report, I'll probably have to write an addendum to it."

Castillo's expression indicated agreement, and Crockett wondered why he was arguing to be granted more paperwork and on a Friday night, yet. *Man, doesn't this guy ever relax?* he wondered as Castillo quietly got into the low slung black car and dutifully applied the seat belt. Sonny settled himself in beside his boss and started the powerful engine before realizing Castillo's dark eyes were boring into him. The blond suddenly realized why and self-consciously donned his own belt, fumbling for the unfamiliar clasp. The lieutenant's icy expression clearly disapproved.

*****

He's a somma time man
In the summer summer time
Especially when it's hot
Sex is always on his mind.

Somma Time Man -- Salt 'n Pepa

Sonny washed the fiery Thai food down with a gulp of beer that wasn't nearly cold enough. He tried not to gasp, but that last mouthful seared his tongue and pallet, leaving him breathless.

Castillo was speaking softly, saying something about a discrepancy in this report that would eventually cause them problems in court, but Sonny couldn't keep track of the conversation. He took a deep breath and blinked back tears. Castillo was sharing the same food with him, but seemed totally unaffected by its pungency.

Crockett downed more of the tepid brew in a futile quest for relief, then suddenly realized his lieutenant had stopped speaking and was staring at him. He tried smiling gamely, but his mouth was on fire.

"A little too hot to handle, Detective?" the Hispanic asked lightly.

Sonny's jade eyes locked onto the jet black ones across the table from him. *Shit! Is he toying with me?* Crockett wondered with a stab of dismay. He saw a strange gleam in the bottomless eyes -- or was it just his own wishful thinking?

"No, sir," Crockett murmured huskily, with as much bravado as he could muster. "A little spice just adds to the enjoyment. I can handle it. You'd best believe *that*."

Castillo's eyes never wavered and for a second Sonny thought he saw the merest hint of a smile curl up the ends of the lieutenant's mouth, but then it was gone. The Latino lifted another mouthful of the punishing food, then pointed to the report.

Four bites and two beers later, Sonny's head was spinning from the contradictory information in the poorly organized document, his inflamed mouth, and too much alcohol on an empty stomach.

"Who wrote this damned thing, anyway?" the blond grumbled, slapping the folder closed in disgust.

The Hispanic glanced at him wryly. "You did. I thought you knew that."

Crockett groaned. "Enough, Marty, enough. Let me deal with it on Monday. I'll sort it all out then. We've got time."

Nodding agreeably, the lieutenant glanced at his watch. "I should be getting back, anyway."

The blond cop stared at his superior. "Don't you *ever* give it a rest, man? It's *Friday*. Things are slow. Can't you just... *relax* for a weekend?"

The dark suited man tensed and looked away.

"Lighten up, pal," Sonny begged, really concerned now. "Y'know, I can't remember the last time you had a day off, some time to just chill out." Castillo seemed to visibly draw away from him, but this only emboldened Crockett. "Marty, when was the last time you went fishin'?"

The Latino finally met his eyes.

"Don't go back to the office," Sonny said quietly, sensing this might be his best chance. "Whatever's there can wait. It's a beautiful night. I've got the poles and some good bait. Come out to the boat with me, Marty. Let's forget the job and go night fishin'. Even you need some sanity maintenance. Wha'd'ya say?" Crockett was surprised to realized he really wanted this, wanted Castillo to come on the boat with him even if it was for nothing more than relaxation and companionship. To his utter amazement, the lieutenant seemed to be actually considering it.

Finally, the darker man swallowed. "My presence on that boat could compromise your cover." His voice was low, almost regretful.

"I've got a suit in the trunk I was takin' back to Property," Crockett explained brightly. "It's cut too small for me, and it's too dark for my tastes, but it'll fit you, Marty. You can come on the boat under cover. Once we're out at sea, there's no problem."

Castillo said nothing for a long moment, so finally Crockett said teasingly, "Hey, it'll be our secret. No one will ever have to know you took a Friday night off. Come *on*."

Sitting back, Martin stared at his detective. Finally, he pushed his chair away from the table and held out his hand. Sonny blinked, confused.

"The keys to the car," the lieutenant said tersely. "I'll need to get the clothes if I'm going to change in the rest room here. Then we'll go to the boat."

Crockett couldn't stop himself from grinning as he handed over the Ferrari keys.

Standing, Castillo gave Sonny an amused look, then murmured, "You can take care of the check while I'm gone."

Ouch, thought Crockett, digging for his well worn credit card. *Got me!*

* * * * *

And he was just like a great dark wing
Within the wings of a storm
I think I had met my match....

Sara -- Fleetwood Mac

By the time the *St. Vitus Dance* was anchored out at sea, the sun was lighting up the sky in one of Miami's classic, brassy sunsets. As Sonny dropped and secured the sails, he couldn't help but wonder if his taciturn companion was at all affected by the romantic setting.

Castillo was standing on the forward deck, watching the sunset in silence. Elvis stood not five feet away, amiably ignoring the stranger, and Marty had shown the same polite indifference to the huge reptile.

Two dinosaurs cutting each other some respect, Crockett mused, remembering the epitaph laid on Castillo by the federal agents who'd stood over Gretsky's body.

The lieutenant had already shed the midnight black designer suit jacket and black silk tie, and now stood in the sleek black pants that seemed to be cut just for his slim legs and narrow hips. The black, raw silk shirt billowed and snapped around his chest in the crisp sea wind. He'd undone the cuffs and rolled the long, dark sleeves above his elbows and now stood, hands deep in his pockets, his powerful forearms contrasting handsomely against the somber clothes.

Sonny had to swallow and pull his eyes away. He was more attracted to Castillo than he'd been willing to admit to Rico, or even to himself. Finally alone with his lieutenant on the boat, Sonny had to face the fact that this guy had really gotten to him, had really crawled under his skin. The Cuban's quiet strength, his cat like grace, the raw power in his black eyes.... Castillo could make Sonny shiver with just a look from those eyes. He tried not to think of the effect the man was having on Burnett. That was too scary.

Crockett shook his head. Well, he'd gotten to first base, anyway. He had the man all to himself, out on his boat, actually interested in relaxation, not intent on work.

The Vice cop slipped down below and shed his expensive jacket and confining shoulder holster. Grabbing two fishing poles, he came up and went into the cooler for the bucket of bait. He tried not to anticipate what might happen, tried not to calculate his chances, but Burnett was already two steps ahead of him, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

"Say, Marty," Sonny said, approaching the darker man, "if you want to shed those duds, I've got a pair of swim trunks you can wear."

Castillo never turned his eyes from the sea, never reacted to what his detective had said. "Sonny," he finally rasped softly, "what's this all about?"

The question brought Crockett up short. He hesitated too long, he knew, before managing to stammer, "Fishing, man. It's about fishing."

The lieutenant turned slowly, finally meeting Sonny's wide open gaze with his own piercing one. "You've been after some-

thing for nearly a month now. I ignored it, thinking you'd eventually be frank about it, or give it up. I should've known better. You're no quitter. So, I came here tonight to get to the bottom of it. What is it you're after, Sonny? What do you want?"

It was a long speech for Castillo, but not long enough for the younger cop to collect his thoughts. *Damn,* the Floridian swore to himself. What was he supposed to do now, blurt out, hey, Lieutenant, I'm hot for your bod? He swallowed and had to moisten his lips before he could speak. "Shit, Marty, you've caught me kind of flat footed...."

Something sparked in Castillo's eyes, something dangerous and Sonny had to stifle the urge to flinch. He'd seen that look before -- in a Buddhist temple, when Castillo was being confronted by the federal agents as he stood, grief stricken, over the body of his friend.

"Okay, I'll be honest. It's about you, Marty, and the way I feel about you." Drawing up his courage, Crockett reached out, and brushed Martin's cheek gently with the back of his hand. "The way I hope you might feel about me."

Castillo locked eyes with him for a second as Sonny stroked his cheek, fueling his hopes. Then, as quick as a snake, the Cuban's left hand grabbed his detective's caressing fingers and twisted them punishingly into a vise-like grip. The unexpected pain shot through Crockett's body and he fell to his knees with a strangled cry. His bad knee took the full force of the fall and stars spangled behind his eyes from the blow. Too late, he recalled Rico's dire warnings.

"Damn, Marty," he hissed through clenched teeth, "you don't have to break my hand! A simple 'no' would do."

Castillo loomed over him, his mouth close to the cop's ear. "What is it about me that made you think I might want *you*?" he murmured with a deadly calm.

Oh, shit, Crockett's mind moaned, *I had to come on to a homophobe. Way to go, Slick.*

"Nothing, Marty, nothing. It was strictly my attraction to you, man. Let's just forget it, okay? Pretend it never happened."

"Too late for that, Detective," Castillo purred.

Crockett shivered. *There goes my career,* he thought, his heart sinking. Why didn't he ever listen to his partner?

Tightening his grip on Sonny's twisted hand, the Latino buried his right hand in the thick, blond hair. Cruelly, he pulled the cop up to his feet. Crockett was weak from the pain and clutched Castillo's arm with his left hand just to steady himself.

"Why don't you fight back, Sonny?" Martin hissed. "You're a powerful fighter, I've seen you."

Swallowing, the younger man tried to find his voice. "And I've seen *you.* I don't need to get my ass kicked all over this boat. Damn it, man, you're really hurting me!"

Something ominous glimmered in Castillo's expression, making Crockett's stomach lurch. *Oh, great, he's a* ***sadistic*** *homophobe.*

The increasing pain wasn't letting Sonny think, all he could do was feel, and what he was feeling was dangerously close to panic. But in every desperate situation in his life, he'd always been able to rely on the dark resources of that part of his personality he called Burnett -- the cold, calculating side of him.

It was Burnett who moved now, brazenly using Sonny's free hand to pull Castillo closer to him, until the two men were pressed together tightly, groin to groin. It was Burnett who moved his hips against Castillo's black clad ones.

And it was Burnett who whispered throatily, "You like hurting me, Marty? That's okay. I can handle it rough. I can handle anything you want to dish out, baby."

Blood rushed into Castillo's face darkening it. He released Sonny's hand, only to reach down and clamp onto his testicles. Crockett cried out loudly and would have collapsed except for the fingers entwined in his hair and locked around his balls.

That was Burnett's big problem, Sonny thought wryly. He never knew when to quit.

"Is that right, Detective?" Castillo growled. "You think you can handle *me*?"

Sonny wanted to shake his head, take back his words, even beg for mercy, but he couldn't. He was completely speechless and could only gasp shallowly as he struggled

not to puke. A lone tear trickled from one eye. Castillo wouldn't be happy unless he completely broke him, he realized sickly. How could he have so misjudged him?

"IAD put you onto me, didn't they?" Castillo demanded harshly. "That's what all this is about, isn't it, Crockett?"

Sonny thought at first he was hearing things, then realized what it was his boss was asking him. He added *paranoid* to the list of the lieutenant's personality quirks, and somehow managed to shake his head.

"Are you wired?" Martin wondered, but wouldn't release his grip long enough to check. "Tell me the truth, or you'll go overboard."

Crockett again struggled to shake his imprisoned head. Reaching down, he touched Castillo's wrist, as if begging him to ease up, and was surprised when the dark man obliged. He didn't free Sonny, but held the delicate organs more gently. The blond's body suddenly belonged to himself again and he drew in a deep, shaky breath. Castillo rolled the tender globes carefully in his palm just to remind the cop who was still in control.

The sensation that evoked was surprisingly thrilling and in spite of everything, Crockett felt his cock start to grow. Futilely, he fought to suppress it, afraid it would only enrage Castillo further.

"Marty," Sonny croaked helplessly, "you're my lieutenant. You've stood up for me against IAD again and again. You'd think I'd work *for them* against you? Come on, man, get real! I'd never sell you out. Who'd ever work with me again, who'd ever trust me? You gotta believe me. I was *attracted* to you. I'd hoped, when you came on board tonight, we could share something. But, if it's not your thing, then we'll just forget it. You want me out of the department, I'll transfer tomorrow. But I'd *never* sell you out, man, you gotta believe that."

He held Martin's gaze steadily and saw the conflicting feelings there. Suddenly, he realized something else, something that surprised him. "Is it *that* hard for you to believe you're attractive to me?"

Castillo's face changed, his expression wary.

Sonny started talking faster, fearing this might be his only chance to get through to the him. "You're a helluva man. You're ruggedly handsome, got a great body, cat-like grace -- who wouldn't be attracted to you?"

He could see the disbelief plainly in the dark eyes.

Then Burnett threw his two cents in. "You think Gretsky was the only man who could want you?" Sonny asked in a low, suggestive voice.

The pain that enveloped his sac nearly drove him back to his knees.

"That's what this is all about," Castillo decided calmly as he controlled his victim with an almost casual power. "*Gretsky.* That's when IAD got interested in me. Did they think I wouldn't notice their interest, their surveillance? Did they think *you* were the perfect temptation to put in my way?"

Lights swirled behind Sonny's eyes and for one dangerous moment he thought he might faint. Struggling for air, he gasped, "Marty. Please. You gotta believe me...." Desperate, fearing that he might only be making another stupid move, Sonny reached down to grip the wrist that was attached to the punishing hand. Sliding his own palm up Castillo's forearm, he pressed it against his hardened cock to prove his point. "IAD didn't send *this*," he murmured throatily. "I dig you, man. I want you. What's wrong with that?"

As the pain centered on his groin began to ease, Sonny realized the situation was changing subtly. In a way, that scared him even more. Castillo's grip in his hair lightened, and some of the tension left the taut body. Crockett kept his erection pressed against his abuser.

"I just want to please you, Marty. Just give me a chance," he murmured as seductively as he knew how. "When was the last time anyone held you, touched you, satisfied you? Gretsky? May Ying? You've been separated from them for over five years. But I know you've been alone too long if a caress from a friend is so alien, it makes you look for Big Brother."

He moved his hips slightly to make the rigid organ ride against Castillo's arm. Gripping the older man's wrist, Sonny tugged

until the lieutenant released his hold on the agonized testicles and allowed the blond to guide his hand. The younger cop rested the palm against his turgid flesh. That sent a jolt through Crockett and he had to stifle a groan. "It's just you and me out here, pal. This is just between us. Let me please you, Marty, or at least let me try. Can't you *feel* my wanting?"

Suddenly, the tension was back in the lieutenant's body. "A man like you," he whispered tightly, "could have anyone he wanted. Anyway he wanted. That makes some men feel powerful. Makes them feel they can control their lovers."

Sonny rolled his eyes in exasperation. "First off, I'm not interested in just *anyone.* Secondly, I'm turned down as much as any other man. As far as that goes, I haven't had much luck in landing you after a month of trying, have I? And thirdly -- only a fool would ever think he could control Martin Castillo." He managed a weak grin. "I may be crazy, but I'm nobody's fool."

He felt Castillo shift again and ease back, as some of the tension left his spine. Wildly, Crockett's mind spun out of control. Was he going for it? Would he consider it? Neither of them could pretend Castillo wasn't still grasping another man's cock through the light fabric of the pants, holding it, caressing it smoothly, making no attempt to hurt him. Instead, the hand was now as gentle as it had been cruel and the strange touch was making Crockett's heart race, making his breath come in short, rapid gasps. He realized the only thing between Martin's palm and the bare skin of his excited flesh was one thin layer of linen.

Castillo tightened his grip and Sonny felt the rough material ride over his tender, inflamed skin. The incredibly erotic sensation made him ache to feel the texture of that hot palm; even that thin fabric was too much of a barrier between them now. He let his wanting show raw through his eyes, and waited for Castillo to read it there.

The cop could barely stand up, he was so excited, he wanted Castillo so much. Both of them stood rooted in place, Sonny hanging on for dear life, panting shallowly, Castillo moving nothing but that one hand, petting, stroking the rigid flesh so carefully, so tenderly, so expertly. Sonny couldn't remember ever being teased so perfectly. He wanted to climb all over the Latin, force his way inside him, become one of his ribs. Finally, a bubble of ejaculate scalded its way through his cock and dribbled out, soaking through his pants. He stared at Castillo as if to say *See what you're doin' to me, man.*

Swallowing hard, the Latino rubbed his thumb very deliberately over the wet place, caressing the weeping head. Sonny couldn't help himself. He sagged and moaned Martin's name. Still, Castillo never budged, never shifted his weight. Slowly, cautiously, Sonny moved his bruised hand up to again caress a roughened cheek. He hoped Castillo would understand the gesture. If the Latin chose the same punishment for the badly battered hand, Sonny would probably pass out. He was trusting his lieutenant. Trusting him openly.

The Cuban stood rock still under the tender touch, reminding Sonny of a wild animal caught in a headlight's glare, afraid that to move will cause disaster, but that to stand still will cause the same. The blond slid his hand slowly around the back of the Hispanic's neck, his fingers entangling in the dense hair that trailed over the black collar. He didn't try to pull Castillo's head to him, he just held it steady as he bent his own head to gently kiss the downturned mouth. The kiss was light, closed-mouthed, a tender touch to the mustached lips. Crockett trembled in anticipation and outright fear as Castillo refused to react, yet failed to pull away.

Deciding that anything would be better than indifference, the blond kissed his boss gently again, touching his lips to the sides of his mouth, the corners, the full lower lip. Softly, he murmured Martin's name.

The hand still gripping his hair released him to stroke once, tenderly, then it quickly clutched another handful. At the same time, Martin opened his mouth.

Sonny groaned at the abrupt assault as Castillo's tongue plunged into him. His own tongue battled happily with the invader as the two men melded in a passionate kiss, heedless of their visibility out in the open air.

The kiss grew, becoming frantic, desperate, as they tasted each other, drank each other, tried to crawl down each other's throats. Sonny bit Martin's lower lip and Castillo gasped then nipped the blond's tongue. Their teeth clicked as they waged their wonderful, wet war.

The Hispanic never released Sonny's cock, but stroked it more firmly now, as though fearing to let it go. His grip on the now painfully swollen member was making Sonny crazed. Castillo wanted him, really wanted him and his heart felt as though it couldn't stand the joy and pain of it. His hips started pumping as his passion overwhelmed him and he lost all judgment.

Sonny shook all over. He wanted to shove Castillo down onto the deck and fuck him right out in the open, or, if not that, wrap his own legs around those narrow hips and let Castillo have him -- something he'd never allowed any other man to do. His brain was racing, searching for ways to get Castillo below deck without breaking from their kiss.

Sliding his left hand confidently from around the black-clad man's waist, he moved it down over Martin's hip, then rubbed his palm enticingly over the crotch of the sleek black pants. He was delighted to find his partner just as hard as he was. The man felt incredible under his hand, beautifully shaped and rigidly erect; his lieutenant was big, much bigger than Sonny expected. It was just another delightful surprise. Boldly, the Floridian grabbed hold of Martin's zipper and tried to pull it down.

Castillo flinched, as if coming out a momentary daze; his eyes snapped open and he pulled away roughly, releasing the cop. Crockett nearly stumbled and clutched at the dark shoulders before he lost his balance.

"Don't!" the darker man hissed angrily and looked away as if embarrassed.

Crockett's first disjointed thought was that his heart might burst. His eyes widened in frustration and confusion. "Don't *what*?" he shouted. "What the hell is with you, man? What are you doin', playin' me to see how frantic you can make me? Or are you *that scared* to be vulnerable to someone else?"

The lieutenant's eyes blazed in fury, but Sonny didn't need Burnett to back him up now. He advanced on the black-suited man fearlessly.

"You're scared shitless to care about someone, aren't you, Marty? It's real easy to hide behind your armor and not let anybody in -- easy and safe. I know you've been hurt. Hell, I've been hurt too, but I don't let it stop me. You may be one tough son-of-a-bitch, pal, but I've got more guts than you. I've got the guts to care about you, no matter how scary that is."

"What has *this* to do with caring?" Castillo asked contemptuously. "You want sex, that's all. I'll give you that, but on my terms."

"Yeah, well, you'd have been right about that yesterday," Sonny admitted hesitantly, "but today, the game's changed." He licked his lips and remembered, with a bizarre clarity, Rico lecturing him on the difference between sexual desire and real feeling. Tubbs' remarks had really hit a nerve that day, forcing Crockett to reevaluate his true interest in Castillo. And what he'd discovered had disturbed him. It rattled him to realized just how well his partner knew him.

He glared at his boss, furious with him, with himself, with Tubbs, with his raging hard-on -- with the world in general. "Now I've touched your soul and I've been burned. I've been seared by you, Marty, by your dark eyes and your pain. I want you so bad, I'm hurtin' and that's the truth. But only because I care about you, too. I could love you, Marty... if you let me in."

The raw honesty shocked even Sonny, but he'd meant everything he'd said. He wouldn't take it back. He couldn't. It was, after all, just the plain truth. But the doubt clearly written in Castillo's eyes only infuriated him further, as if his pent-up frustrated passion needed some other outlet. He jabbed a finger in the lieutenant's direction.

"You can forget doin' this *your* way, pal. I know what that's all about. You make me crazy and get your jollies off controllin' me. You never intended to let me touch you, did you? What was it gonna be, a quick, hot fuck, then thanks for the ride? I've had lovers like that before. I'd rather settle for my own

hand. You wanna have somethin' with me? Then it's a two way street, buddy -- or *nothin'*. *We* make love, or *we* don't. *You* decide."

Sonny was surprised at the force of his own anger. His cock was strangling in his pants and his testicles throbbed. He turned his back on Castillo to try and adjust himself to get some relief, then took a few deep breathes in a futile effort to calm down.

When the silence lengthened uncomfortably, he finally said softly, "Look, forget this. Forget every thing. I'll set the sails, turn this tub around and have you back at the marina in half an hour. What I said before still goes. I'll give you my transfer in the morning." He tried not to think that Castillo might demand his resignation, but if he did, Sonny knew he wouldn't have the heart to fight it.

He reached for the lines, wincing at the pain in his right hand, his whole body shaking from the adrenaline coursing through his blood. Without warning, Castillo was beside him, grasping the wrist of the offended hand carefully, stopping Sonny's activity. The blond turned to face the Cuban.

"Wait." Castillo's voice was so soft, Sonny wasn't even sure he'd spoken. The darker man was struggling for words, trying to find the right thing to say. "You're right... about me," he murmured finally. "I've been alone too long. Too long to trust easily."

Castillo licked his lips and finally met Sonny's eyes. Crockett stilled himself, wanting to give Marty the time he needed.

"I've lost everyone I've ever loved, Sonny. I've lost them to death. Violent death. Murder. Ambush. Grenades. Sometimes... by my own hand. After a while, it's safer not to feel, not to care, and especially not to love. In a few years, you stop believing anyone could ever care back. You look for double meanings in everything. You stop trusting completely."

He glanced away, but didn't release Sonny's wrist. "As we worked together, I found myself drawn to you. I never thought you could be interested in me. I saw you with Gina, with other women... and wondered about you and Tubbs. When you started coming on to me, I had to find another reason. It had to be an IAD set up to find my weakness, to dismiss me from the force. I couldn't believe... it was as simple as real desire. Real caring. If I let myself believe that...." He paused, unable to finish the long speech.

"You thought something would happen to me? You thought... I'd *die*?" Sonny realized. It really wasn't too crazy of an idea. Crockett had had brushes with death before when he'd been distracted by the thrill of a new lover. Besides, their jobs were so dangerous, they were all only a heartbeat from death after all.

"Do you believe in karma, Sonny?" Castillo said quietly.

"Fuck, no!" Crockett snorted. "But I believe in bad luck and bad breaks. And I believe sometimes even unlucky people finally get the break they deserve... if they aren't too scared to take advantage of it."

Something like amusement passed over Castillo's face. "And I deserve you?"

Crockett smiled crookedly and shrugged. "Call it karma, Marty. Maybe you'll do better in your next life."

Castillo started to turn away when Crockett added, "You *deserve* to have someone love you. You deserve that. Someone to love you, to care about you, to stand beside you... to satisfy you...." His voice had gotten huskier as he went down the list until it had completely tightened up again, as taut as the cock that throbbed under his damp pants. "Marty, I'm not gonna die on you."

Castillo really stared at him then, his expression bleak. It was a ridiculous statement for a Vice cop to make -- especially one as reckless as Crockett -- and they both knew it. The lieutenant stared at his detective, while still clutching his wrist. Finally, he whispered, gravel-voiced, "Is that a promise?"

Sonny's face eased into a smile. Inside his mind, Burnett murmured *Gotcha!* but Sonny stifled him. He wasn't really sure just who had gotten whom here. "That's a promise, Lieutenant."

"If... I deserve you," Martin said quietly, "what is it you deserve?"

Sonny paused, considering his next statement carefully. Finally, he reached over and took Marty's free hand and drew it back

to his crotch, placing it carefully against his tense, angry flesh. He thought Castillo trembled slightly when he touched him. "I think I deserve some relief. Don't you?"

The black-clad man deliberately drew them back into their previous embrace. "Perhaps," he growled darkly, and Sonny grinned at his surprising playfulness.

Then his lips were under Castillo's again, his mouth being forced open by a demanding tongue, the wet heat of the lieutenant's need invading him wonderfully. The dark hand tightened against his tender organ and the pain and pleasure lit up behind his green eyes, making him weak. "Marty," he gasped desperately around the powerful kisses. "Marty!"

"Did you mean what you said before?" Castillo whispered against his mouth, sounding surprisingly desperate himself.

Sonny blinked, confused.

"When you said... you could handle it rough? Is that what you want?"

Crockett shivered and had to swallow. "Part of me does...."

"Burnett?" Castillo asked knowingly.

The younger man's eyes widened. "How did you -- ?"

"I've worked undercover for years," he explained. "I have my own 'Burnett' to live with, Sonny. It's one of the things that made me question your attraction to me."

The cop's expression was still confused.

"It was always *Burnett* showing the greatest interest." Castillo brushed his lips lightly against the blond's then nipped his lower lip, making him gasp delightedly.

"I can't lie, Marty," Sonny admitted. "He's *hot* for you." Then the blond man smiled. "But, he doesn't always know what's best for us."

"Still," Castillo murmured throatily, "we should keep him happy, shouldn't we?"

Crockett couldn't suppress the shudder of desire that wracked him. "I don't know," he rasped, realizing he was rapidly losing his composure. "He works best when he's hungry."

The two men stared at each other for a long moment, until Crockett finally whispered, "And right now, he's real hungry...." and slowly sank to his knees.

Castillo stood stock still, but Crockett felt the tremor in the hands he placed on the detective's shoulders. The dark lieutenant watched his subordinate's every move as Sonny rubbed his face provocatively against the hardened bulge under the black cloth. Sonny could feel those black eyes boring into him as he pressed his face against the other man, like a cat begging to be scratched. The younger cop inhaled, smelling the clean-clothes scent of the fabric, and under it, the delicious spicy musk that was Martin's own. His mouth filled with saliva.

He continued teasing, enjoying the way Marty's eyes latched onto him, and relishing the delicious anticipation as he put off the inevitable. Marty stood braced, feet shoulder width apart, moving easily with the rocking of the boat; his hands held Sonny's shoulders, giving him all the freedom he needed to enjoy himself at leisure.

Finally, the blond cop opened his mouth and placed his teeth against Castillo's swelling mound and bit gently. The Cuban sighed softly, but didn't move, so Sonny bit him harder, feeling Burnett stir impatiently.

Castillo released a small moan then and dug a strong hand into Sonny's hair. Crockett chortled when the Latino pulled his head back -- he'd been wondering how long his patience would hold out.

"Enough," the lieutenant growled down at his lover, as he unzipped his fly. Sonny laughed boldly and reached inside for the straining prize, pulling Castillo's heavy organ into the night air.

Crockett couldn't remember when anything so completely male had ever looked so beautiful to him. He'd intended to draw the moment out, tease Castillo till he was wild, but he couldn't. He couldn't wait any longer to be intimate with Marty. He had to have him, now, this second.

As if reading his mind, the Cuban pulled his detective's head back harder. Sonny gasped, his mouth opening. Looking up at his lieutenant, he licked his lower lip slowly. Castillo ran a thumb over that lush, promising lip, then took the cop's chin. "Careful with those teeth," he warned.

Crockett grinned salaciously as Castillo released his chin. Taking hold of his own tur-

gid flesh, Martin fed it to Sonny's full, wet lips. The blond took the large, well-formed cock deep into his mouth quickly, hungrily, devouring his lover greedily. The sensation must've come as a shock to Castillo because he sagged slightly and Sonny heard his name moaned into the night.

Both of Castillo's hands were now buried in Crockett's sandy hair, but he never forced Sonny. He was holding on desperately, passionately. It felt as if Marty's hands were begging him -- to stop, to continue, for more, for an end.

But for Crockett, this was an endless pleasure. He adored oral sex and put all his attention into this singular moment. He sucked Marty deeply, powerfully, then lightly with the gentlest of pressure. He moved his tongue hard, then timidly, around the shaft, over the ridge, then delved the tip into Marty's sensitive slit. He let his lips play with Martin up and down, then holding only the head. He pulled away completely, letting the sea breeze cool the iron hard shaft, then kissed it lightly over the bobbing head and down its length. Then he drank it back in to warm it again, sucking it as if his life depended on it.

Soon, Castillo began to lose his composure. When Sonny heard the stoic man's breath reduced to shallow panting, it thrilled him, knowing his mouth was the only cause. Finally, he felt Castillo's knees tremble, heard his grit-edged voice whisper, "Enough! Enough!"

But it was not nearly enough for Crockett. He ignored his orders and continued to torture the angry organ with a mouth that enjoyed its work too well.

Castillo tried to pull away, but desire made him weak. Sonny grabbed fistfuls of trouser fabric to pull Castillo into him again and again, forcing him to fuck his mouth.

A small surge of ejaculate rushed through Marty's cock and Sonny drank it hungrily, marveling at the exotic taste of his lover, hungering for more. His own flesh screamed in need, his blood racing, his heart pounding wildly. He only sucked harder, more passionately, pulling Castillo deep inside him, down his throat, wanting everything, every drop of the essence that was Martin.

The Latino was still watching helplessly as Crockett's passion overwhelmed him while he pleasured the dark erection. Suddenly, the stiff organ swelled tightly inside his mouth and Castillo groaned softly. The blond dug his fingers sharply into Marty's buttocks at the same time Castillo's hands clenched powerfully in Sonny's hair. With a sudden surge of strength, Martin hauled the cop off him by his hair and yanked him to his feet. Crying out, Crockett's eyes watered from the pain and disappointment.

"Enough!" Castillo growled, pulling the younger man hard against him.

"No!" Sonny moaned, "I *want* it. I need it. Marty...."

"Not yet," Castillo whispered. "You'll have it and more... but not yet. Not yet." Then his mouth was on Sonny's and his tongue searched the ravaged mouth, finding his own flavor there.

"Taste it?" the Southerner asked huskily. "Taste it, baby? That's you in my mouth..."

Castillo gasped raggedly and tried to climb down Sonny's throat. "Where's the bed?" he rasped, his voice barely a whisper.

"What?" the Anglo asked, confused, reeling from their wild passion.

"The *bed*," Castillo hissed, sounding angry. "*Crockett!* Where's your *bed*?"

"Oh, yeah!" Sonny nodded, dazed. "Forward cabin." Brazenly, he wrapped a hand around the dusky, exposed cock and tugged gently. "Follow me."

The lieutenant had no choice but to oblige.

Sonny moved carefully down the hatch steps, pulling Castillo behind him. He towed the Latino through the galley and into the forward cabin that was completely dominated by the massive king-sized bed. Then, nearly dizzy with need, the Vice cop made the mistake of releasing his lover to climb into bed first.

Castillo used that to his advantage, and suddenly, the darker man was on top of Crockett, all over him, overpowering him. Sonny twisted, grabbing at the Hispanic, and soon they were wrestling wildly, panting and moaning any time either of them scored

a sexual hit. They kept trying to strip each other, but lips and hands kept intruding, distracting them.

Sonny was barechested, his pants' zipper half way down as he grabbed hold of Castillo's billowing silk shirt and sent most of its buttons flying. Then his hands were sliding up under the soft fabric, marveling at the smooth golden skin, the tight muscles, the ridge of hard spine and the delightful scent of his new lover. They were now kneeling on the bed and Sonny could feel Castillo's cock nudging his belly as they kissed and fondled each other with growing urgency.

Martin was still stroking Sonny's rigid erection through his linen pants, as though he'd become enamored of that sensation. The pent-up frustration was killing Crockett. "Enough!" he quipped, quoting Castillo, but he didn't have the strength to demand.

It sounded so odd to hear Marty chuckle against his ear as he pressed Sonny back until he was laying down across his bed. The familiar mattress, the cabin, the surroundings he'd slept in for over ten years suddenly seemed totally new and strange with Castillo's presence.

Sonny could feel Burnett tugging at his mind, warning him. If he wasn't careful, this powerful, enigmatic man would overwhelm him, possess him, totally own him. Burnett wasn't at all comfortable with that idea, but Crockett was somewhat surprised to find the idea bothered him not at all.

Martin was looming over him, running a hand gently over his face, down his neck, stroking his chest lightly, leaving a trail of goose bumps and desire.

"Marty," Sonny gasped, "why are you doing this?"

"You're too hot, Detective," Castillo said darkly. "Slow down. Cool off. We have all night. All day...."

All our lives, Sonny heard the unspoken words in his mind and they filled his heart.

He reached to touch Martin's organ, still thrusting through the black pants, but Castillo deflected him. "Wait," the Latino purred.

Sonny moaned and sagged back on the bed. Then the gentle fingertips were rubbing teasing patterns over his swollen crotch, outlining the damp spot, trailing down to the tender testicles, running over the zipper that separated Sonny's need from the object of his desire.

"Gonna make me come in my pants?" Sonny asked irritably.

Castillo rewarded him with a hint of a smile. "Have you ever?"

Sonny rolled his eyes. "Not since high school!"

Castillo's eyes narrowed. "Might be an interesting experience."

"You bastard!" Crockett grumbled, making his cruel lover smile. Then Martin slowly took hold of the zipper and pulled it down. Sonny's damp cock sprang forth, wine red and furious.

The Cuban looked at his subordinate wryly. "Detective. You have no underwear on."

"I'm undercover, Lieutenant," he reminded his boss. "I don't have to follow dress code. And pardon me if I express some doubt that this is the first time you've noticed that."

Castillo's hands wrapped themselves in the light-colored pants and slowly stripped them off his lean legs. Then the teasing fingers trailed along the soft skin on Sonny's inner thigh, until the cop writhed, clutching the pillow around his head, gulping air and shuddering. The gentle fingertips lightly stroked the silken sac.

Sonny hissed sharply, his eyes widening. "Marty, easy! They're still hurtin'."

His lieutenant's expression changed. The Vice cop was startled to see the depth of emotion there, as the taunting look fled. The black eyes gazed sorrowfully at his reclining lover.

"Forgive me," he whispered. He pulled Sonny's bruised right hand to his lips and kissed it gently. "I'm so sorry I hurt you." Before the blond could answer, Martin bent his head and, with the utmost gentleness, pressed his lips against the velvet sac.

The Floridian almost lost it then completely, and moaned in desperation. That tender, teasing kiss led to another and another until Sonny's tender scrotum shrank from the intense pleasure. Then the incredibly soft lips and tormenting moustache

traveled towards the straining erection. The helpless cop felt himself leaking hot drops of his essence in terrible anticipation. That mouth just continued its slow, terrible path along his pulsing shaft, up towards the flaring, straining head.

By the time Martin's tongue lapped the thick fluid dripping down his rod and over his glans, the blond had past the point of having any control over his body. Castillo had already surpassed his wildest fantasies, and Crockett's need to come was screaming in every cell, every nerve. He feared that when Martin finally did take him into his mouth, he'd just explode, like a star going nova. He clutched Martin's hair and tried to find his voice.

"Don't, baby, don't! I'm too close. I'll come!" he rasped frantically.

"Shhh," Castillo murmured.

Sonny's aching flesh was suddenly enveloped in hot, wet tightness at the same time a powerful hand clamped down on his shaft, holding back the surge, preventing the release.

"Oh, *shit*!" Crockett groaned, bucking wildly.

Martin sucked him and the younger cop went boneless, nearly delirious from the incredible sensation as the Latino worked his mouth and tongue over Sonny's turgid, painful manhood.

Long moments of agonizingly sweet pleasure slipped by. Crockett found himself watching Castillo blowing him, watching him use his mouth, watching as his magical hands held off Sonny's release again and again. Castillo was good at this, an amazing expert, his hands, lips and tongue working in perfect concert. Crockett was soon lost in a fog of wonderful agony, moaning softly, writhing, praying for a release that felt micro-seconds away, but became impossible to achieve.

After awhile he heard his voice babbling, mumbling, saying anything he could think of to get Martin to end it, but still it went on.

Soon he was exhausted, drenched in sweat, his nerves aroused to the point of pain. He felt like weeping and laughing all at once. It was hell and heaven, the most wonderful suffering he'd ever known.

Finally, Burnett moved him, made him slide his hands over Marty's head and neck, his strong, taut shoulders. Castillo never budged, just kept working Crockett slowly, easily, keeping him in tight control.

Burnett moved them, and Sonny marveled at it, as his body shifted; he wondered how he had the energy to do anything, considering what Marty's tongue was doing to the head of his cock.

At last, he realized what Burnett was trying to get him to do, and happily he cooperated. With a soft sigh of pleasure, he wriggled around on the large bed until he could slide under the lieutenant and capture his heavy organ in his own hands.

Castillo jumped, his rhythm faltered and Burnett smiled. Then Sonny was lapping at that sweet, turgid flesh and the Latino shivered. In defiance of his earlier warning, Burnett gently, cautiously, touched Martin's hot flesh with his teeth and Castillo reacted sharply, but still hung on to his prize. So Burnett bit him again, becoming intoxicated with the potential power of his mouth. He nibbled the conical head, then moved his teeth behind the sharply defined ridge, feeling the heavy meat jerk in protest.

A sharp slap rocked the side of his rump as warning, and the stinging discipline shocked and thrilled the cop. It only enticed Burnett to bite again, making Castillo cry out softly around him. The slap this time was sharper, landing deliberately in the same tender spot as the last. The next nip was crueler, and this time Castillo rolled them to slap Crockett square on the buttocks with the flat of his palm, then again on the same spot, and again, and again, until Burnett was forced to yield.

His ass was now tender and hot, yet exciting him beyond belief as Crockett reined in his manic alter ego. Ignoring Burnett's need to fight back, Sonny ran his tongue over the hot flesh riding his mouth and showed his lover just how gentle he could be. Martin kept stroking his palm over the hot, red hand prints on Sonny's ass as warning, and perhaps, because he enjoyed feeling the heat he'd left there.

Soon, the two of them were moving in sync, sucking, lapping, devouring one another. Sonny could feel Castillo losing it under his attention, as the slender body tensed and relaxed over and over as they worked each other. It was an amazing experience for Sonny, who ached to come, to feel Marty drink him down, but who couldn't bear the thought of ending it. More than anything, he wanted to taste that hot surge in the back of his throat. He hungered for it, longed for it.

Finally, Marty's erection grew even larger in his mouth, presaging the end. Crockett dug his fingers into his lover's buttocks, pulling him forcefully into his hot mouth. Castillo gasped, his chest heaving for air, and he moaned softly around Sonny's aching organ, the vibrations of that pleasure-song humming along his nerves.

Do it, Sonny encouraged in his mind. *Give it to me, baby. Come on!*

But when Castillo tensed and sighed softly, Sonny was surprised by the flood that filled him. He nearly choked, then drank, swallowing quickly. Castillo kept coming, pumping into him, threatening to drown him, as if half a decade's celibacy were being plumbed this one time. Sonny hung on, not wanting to lose even a drop of his lover's precious fluid. The intense intimacy of the moment was almost more than the Southerner could bear.

Through it all, Castillo had not stopped his attention. Now, his hands released their stranglehold on Sonny's abused flesh, and, at the same time, he took the entire organ all the way into him, deep-throating his lover in one swift move.

It was incredibly erotic, a shocking, sudden change. Sonny groaned loudly as he felt Castillo's mouth and throat envelop him. His body clutched, and in the next instance, Martin was sucking him dry, pulling the semen out of him as Crockett came explosively with a shout, and kept on coming until he felt like a hollow husk.

He collapsed, limp, dazed, empty, and completely sated, waiting only for Castillo to curl up beside him, victim of the same sleepy euphoria threatening to overtake him.

But Castillo wasn't curling up beside him. Instead, he left the bed and moved around the cabin, then went into the galley, as though looking for something. *Bathroom?* Crockett wondered, assuming his boss would be able to find it on his own.

Sonny blinked drowsily, wonderfully satisfied and inordinately happy. He thought about that. He was often more wired *after* sex than before it. He sometimes had to come two or three times before feeling like this. His lids drooped and he cuddled his pillow, murmuring, "Marty...? You comin' to bed?"

Castillo appeared beside him without making a sound, and held out a glass of something. Sonny levered himself up on one elbow and took hold of the offered drink, suddenly feeling incredibly dehydrated. Good thing he'd stocked the larder yesterday, he thought, as he polished off the orange juice.

"That hit the spot," Crockett announced, becoming dimly aware that Martin had downed his own drink. Castillo took both empties back to the galley, and Sonny could hear him washing them out. Good thing, too, that his optimism about his bet with Tubbs had forced him to prepare the boat for this eventually. The *St. Vitus* was pristine, a condition he rarely managed to get her in. He hadn't wanted to sabotage his own seduction with the overly-neat Castillo by trying to entice him into the chaotic environment Sonny was usually comfortable with.

Castillo was still puttering around in the kitchen. *What the hell is he up to?* Sonny wondered irritably, wanting nothing more than to have those warm arms surround him so he could fall into a blissful sleep. "You findin' your way around out there, okay?" he called out, an edge of sarcasm in his voice.

The Cuban returned, holding a few things which he placed on the tiny night stand beside the bed. Looked like a towel and something else Sonny couldn't see around Castillo's frame.

"I'm fine," the lieutenant said, matter-of-factly, then took the time to hang up both his and Sonny's clothes.

With a weary sigh, Crockett rolled onto his side away from his lover. Maybe reorganizing his environment before bed was

Marty's nighttime ritual. Sonny tucked the pillow under his head as Martin continued putting things away -- clothes, shoes, his watch -- while opening drawers and closets until he'd completed all his mysterious tasks. Finally, with Sonny hovering on the edge of sleep, the Cuban slid back into the bed and collected the younger cop in his arms, just as the blond had hoped he would. Crockett smiled and sighed contentedly as Marty nuzzled his neck while running warm, long-fingered hands over his tanned arms. Castillo's bare body felt warm and sensual as the lieutenant moved confidently against the blond's spine.

"You all right?" the Hispanic murmured huskily in his detective's ear.

"Oh, I'm better than all right," Sonny assured him, cuddling back against the inviting heat of Martin's smooth skin. "I'm great!" He shifted his hips and his sensitized right buttock suddenly brushed against Marty's stiffened rod. Crockett blinked. *Hmmmm.* "Aren't you sleepy?" he asked hopefully, his brain not quite computing.

Castillo kissed his ear, then his neck, then pressed his lips between tanned shoulder blades. "When a starving man finds a banquet, why would he want to sleep?"

"What is that," Sonny wondered, confused, "some inscrutable Asian saying? Confucius? Zen? Kahlil Gibhran?" He wasn't sure he was ready for philosophy right now.

"Only Castillo," Marty assured him, now deliberately rubbing his erection in the crease of Sonny's buttocks.

The sensation was wonderfully sensual, but Crockett resented giving up the delicious lassitude he had right now. "It's late," he suggested, knowing even before he said it that it wasn't true.

"It's early," Martin informed him, dipping his tongue into Sonny's ear.

Damn! Crockett swore silently. He never could resist that. Leaning into the hot, wet probe, he sighed, "You're not sleepy," as though just realizing it himself.

"But you are," Castillo whispered into that ear, his breath blowing delightedly over the moisture he'd left there.

"Mmmm," Sonny purred, "a little." Marty's hands were toying with both his nipples lightly, making him feel sexy and willing to be seduced. He could get used to his, just laying passively in the arms of an aggressive lover.

"Good," Castillo said, his voice low. "A little sleepy. Very relaxed. That's good." He kissed the other shoulder blade, then his tongue drew delicate patterns on it.

"Mmmmm," Crockett purred again, closing his eyes and just drifting along. "That's nice." He imagined Marty licking him all over, bathing him like a cat, and the sudden fantasy aroused him.

"You like to bite," Castillo said softly.

The Vice detective smiled. "*Burnett* likes to bite."

"Is that who bit me?"

The blond laughed lightly. "He does get carried away."

"Yes," Castillo agreed easily, then lightly nipped the back of Sonny's neck.

The cop gasped in surprise and his cock stirred. *Yes!* he thought, the pleasurable pain traveling down his spine right to his balls. Martin bit him again and Sonny's blood started to flow hotter, yet the lazy, sexual feeling still blanketed him. It was a wonderful seduction.

"And who's biting me?" Crockett rasped as the teeth moved along his spine, laying a path of small nips and little tantalizing nibbles down his back.

"Just Castillo," was the answer.

All through the slow seduction, Martin kept stroking his silken cock against Sonny's ass, slowly, teasingly.

"What else does Burnett like?" Marty asked, rolling Sonny's ear lobe between his teeth.

Air hissed between Crockett's teeth. Martin's hands moved lower, stroking his lover's flat abdomen, his golden flanks, his strong swimmer's thighs. The Floridian almost forgot the question. "Oh, Burnett likes it *intense.* And he *loves* to fuck." The detective smiled, thinking of what it would be like to be inside this man.

"Mmmm," sighed the Cuban, "so does Castillo." He bit Crockett's shoulder harder.

Sonny's eyes snapped open as he suddenly realized what his bed mate had been so busy setting up. The lieutenant's hand

reached back towards the night table, collected something, then returned to his lover.

Wake up, stupid! Burnett barked at him, just as that talented hand encircled Crockett's sleepy, semi-erect staff. Castillo's palm was filled with a slick gel, and as he slid his hand over Sonny's flesh, his organ immediately responded.

*That's **my** lubricant!* Crockett realized, finally understanding Marty's little search-and-recover project.

No shit, Sherlock, Burnett complained. *You're about to get us **fucked**, Bright Eyes. You're supposed to stay alert when you're bedding dangerous men -- or did you forget that?*

Apparently so. Sonny swallowed as Martin coated his own rigid cock with the gel, then returned to stroking the blond. He continued rubbing his erection, now slippery with lubricant, against the Southerner's crack. "Marty?"

"Hmmm?" Castillo murmured, still tenderly kissing the younger cop's back and neck.

The multiple assault was really getting to the blond. He was completely hard now and, dammit, he was *hot.* He remembered Tubbs warning him that this one would be more than he could handle. How could Rico be right on so many fronts? "Marty, wait a minute."

Castillo never slowed his hands, never stopped teasing with his mouth, never stopped that incredible action with his hips. "Yes?"

The tongue slipped back into his ear, plunging deeply, making Sonny's eyes roll up. He forgot what he was going to say, and found himself tightening his buttocks around the intrusive shaft suggestively.

"Am I rushing you?" Castillo asked, without ceasing his activity.

Crockett bit his lower lip, hesitant to admit the truth, but finally there seemed no way around it. "I... uh..., Marty, that is -- I've never done this before."

"I didn't think so," Castillo admitted. His honesty chilled Crockett a little. His virginity didn't seem to discourage the Latin any. "I didn't think Burnett would let you."

"I, uh... I don't think he's gonna let me now, either," Crockett said, with a light laugh.

"Let me handle Burnett," Castillo said ominously.

Uh-oh, Crockett thought, his gut twisting.

He opened his mouth to say something else, but Martin murmured, "Ssssh," in his ear and stilled him. "Just lie in my arms. Close your eyes. Be sleepy. Relax. Feel my hands, my mouth...."

Those aren't the parts that concern me, pal, Burnett snarled. Adrenaline coursed through Sonny, his fight-or-flight response and Martin's seduction sending jolts of electricity up his spine. But everything the Cuban was doing felt *so* good.

Hey, when it's inevitable, he thought. Shutting his eyes, he tried to follow his lover's advice. Enough of his sleepy lassitude remained to heighten his feeling of helplessness and, surprisingly, that only added to the thrill Martin was giving him. Castillo was stroking him one-handed, and it was incredible, intense, profound. Sonny rocked his hips slightly, but between Marty's grip on his cock, and his presence behind, he couldn't move much, just writhe a little. As he did, he knew his contact with Castillo's slippery organ had to be exciting the Cuban, but the darker man was concentrating on control right now, and wouldn't give anything away.

Once again he heard Rico's voice. *You're playin' with fire. Castillo is the most **serious** dude I've ever met. When he walks into a room, it's like a storm gathering. We're talking about a man who was able to turn his back on his ex-wife and shoot his ex-lover to death.*

He shoved the words away, concentrating on the erotic sensations battering his willpower.

"You're trembling," Martin whispered in his ear.

"We're talkin' about a major life-style change here, pal," Burnett complained through Sonny's teeth.

Martin kissed the soft skin right below Crockett's ear then nipped it lightly, making Sonny's knees turn to water. "All your lovers. And you never let anyone in?"

"Not our style," Burnett insisted, with a lazy drawl.

"Really?" Castillo murmured, as he slipped a confident hand, slick with lube, between them. It slid down Sonny's crack, unerringly finding the dark mouth there. Martin stroked it lightly with a greased fingertip, as if petting a skittish animal.

"Marty?" Sonny gasped, unable -- and unwilling -- to avoid the dangerous touch.

"Shhh," Castillo warned, rubbing the ball of his finger over and over that tight entrance. "Close your eyes. Relax. Let yourself enjoy this."

Reaching back, Sonny placed a hand on Martin's hip, as if he could somehow slow down or stop what was happening to him. Damn, his lieutenant knew how to make this feel *wonderful.*

"How's that?" Castillo asked, still toying with him, playing with his tight hole, making dark promises, telling marvelous lies.

"Marty," Sonny breathed, losing his grip on what was happening. His body responded without his consent, relaxing under that sweet, tormenting digit, flexing, clenching, winking as if trying to speak, to invite, to beg.... "Marty, I... I can't.... Don't -- "

Without warning, the fingertip playing with him suddenly slipped inside his body.

"Oh, *damn!"* Crockett moaned throatily, tightening down hard around the invader. This was reality, the absolute truth, and it struck him hard, shooting up his spine like a current, but it was still dark and wickedly marvelous.

Castillo grunted softly, but never stopped manipulating his hand, moving his finger gently just inside the entrance, teasing it, tantalizing it.

An intense sexual rush hit Sonny's groin as waves of pleasure and a shock of fear raced along every neuron, every individual nerve. In spite of his own conscious wishes, he found himself relaxing, pushing back against the invader. No matter what he told himself about his outraged masculinity, his body wanted more.

Coldly, Burnett analyzed the situation, showing Sonny just how he could extricate himself from this position, but Crockett couldn't concentrate with Marty assaulting him so sexually.

"How's that?" Castillo asked.

Sonny shook his head, his only response to Burnett's frantic attempts to get him out of this spot.

"Too much?" Castillo wondered, trying to interpret his reaction. "Not enough?"

The finger moved inside slowly, smoothly, and the feelings that ripped through the blond paralyzed him. His breath tore out of him in ragged gasps. When the digit began carefully fucking him, lights spangled behind his eyes. He groaned low, as if the sound were being pulled out of him, and Martin purred in answer.

"...Can't... go through with this...." Sonny rasped, even as his ass betrayed him, moving against his impaler, taking him in, sucking on his digit as if it could swallow it whole.

"No?" Castillo asked softly. His other hand had never stopped stroking Sonny's rigid staff. He teased the head of the angry flesh with his thumb, making Crockett quiver. "So hard -- for someone who feels no pleasure."

The finger moved deeper, opening him, invading him. Helplessly, Sonny spread his legs, trying to accommodate the alien force inside him. "How... long has it been for you?" the cop asked.

Castillo hesitated, as if wondering why he wanted to know.

"With Gretsky," Crockett insisted. "I know the two of you had it bad for each other. This is no time to lie to me. How long since you fucked him -- or any other man?"

Martin never stopped his actions, but Sonny could feel a reticence come over him, as if he still had some small fear that the younger man might betray him with the information. Finally, he said, "Seven years, at least."

Seven years, Crockett computed. That meant he and Gretsky split before May Ying. "No man since?"

Another slight hesitation. "No. No one at all since -- I thought my wife had been killed."

Five years without the comfort of a woman. Seven years without a man beneath him. Great. I'm in bed with a goddamn ***Vulcan!*** Sonny

swallowed, running that around his mind. "I'm not gettin' outta here without getting nailed, am I?" he asked bluntly.

"No," Castillo assured him, and slid a second finger inside.

Sonny cried out and lost the feeling in his legs. All sensation was centered at the end of his spine, right below his tailbone. It was the focus of his world, everything he was, the only thing he knew, the only part of him that mattered. Somewhere in his mind he tried to analyze Martin's answer to his last question, but his brain kept dumping the result as if the conclusion was simply unacceptable. But it didn't matter what his logical mind concluded. Martin was still there, behind him -- the one factor that Sonny could not control.

Castillo's hand pumped deep inside now, stretching him unbearably. Crockett clawed a slender hip and in answer, Martin sank his teeth hungrily into the back of the cop's neck. That surprising, sharp sensation shocked Sonny so much he relaxed around the hand, which never let up fucking him.

Stop fighting it, he ordered Burnett uselessly. He'd been able to talk his way out of this with a few bad dudes in the past, but Castillo could never be argued out of anything he'd set his mind on. Besides, Sonny had done this same thing to other men, taken them through their first time, so this was just payback, wasn't it?

To think this whole thing had been *his* idea!

When the third finger entered him, Burnett panicked. He choked on a strangled cry and fought uselessly against the imprisoning hands. The futile actions only made his body tighten down hard around the demanding hand, and the resulting pain rocketed through him, making his spine feel fused, sending shocks of light and fire flashing behind his eyes. As if that weren't enough, Castillo turned him onto his stomach with ease and rolled on top of him, his slight weight pinning the helpless cop to the mattress.

"How many men have *you* had in this position," the Latin murmured darkly. "How many women?"

He's talking to Burnett, Crockett realized, and remembered, too late, Marty saying, *Let me handle Burnett.* "I don't put notches on my headboard, dammit!"

"Five? Ten? Twenty? More? And how many tried to leave? How many escaped?"

Sonny shut his eyes. He knew the answer. None. Not a one. If you took up the challenge, you just had to ride it out.

"How many enjoyed it?" Martin asked. "How many ended the night curled in pleasure around you?"

All of them, Sonny told himself. He made sure of it. No one left this boat without that look of total satisfaction. He might take what he wanted, but he always gave back as good as he got. He never had a lover turn him down a second time.

"Don't you believe I can please you?" Castillo asked, even as his tireless hand opened Sonny's body, forcing him to relax, to yield to his lover's dangerous demands. "Or is this just an identity problem?"

"Forgive me if I question your techniques, pal," Burnett growled sarcastically. "You *are* a little out of practice."

"That's why planning is so important," Martin assured him, twisting his hand in such a way to make Sonny tighten up hard.

"*Damn!*" he gasped, feeling a surge of panic introduced to all the other sensations overwhelming him. "Been fantasizing about this, huh?" Before today, no one could've made him believe that Marty ever had anything on his mind but work.

"Your desk is placed so that your back is to my office," the lieutenant said in a disturbingly clear voice, never pausing, never slowing his pace or losing his focus. His hand moved expertly, keeping his detective under total control. "Do you have any idea how often you lean across that desk to get something from Rico?"

Sonny was startled to realize he'd never thought about the picture that presented to his boss. In other circumstances, it would've made him laugh.

"In my office," Castillo continued calmly, his punishing hand moving deeper, deeper into Sonny's progressively more compliant body, "in the strategy room, you often turn your back on me, and shove your hands in your pockets, pulling your pants tight across

your rear. I often wondered if you did that deliberately -- for *my* benefit."

Crockett shook his head in denial, but didn't want to examine that too clearly. "You son-of-a-bitch. You've been scheming on this a long time."

"Not as long as you've been offering," Castillo reminded him, still manipulating him, controlling everything he felt, every sensation of pain, every electric jolt of pleasure.

Crockett shuddered uncontrollably and knew he'd lost complete control of this situation -- something he normally never allowed.

"Too hot to handle, Detective?" Martin whispered in his ear.

Sonny groaned, remembering Marty taunting him in the restaurant, as if throwing down a challenge. And he remembered, too, how cavalierly he'd accepted it. *Oh, I can handle it, Lieutenant!* Swallowing his pride, he whispered, "Yeah, it's too hot for me. I can't handle this."

"The spirits of your other lovers surround us in this room," Castillo murmured. "When you had them in this situation, when they said those same words to you, did you let them go?"

Say whatever you have to! Burnett insisted. But Sonny couldn't. He'd meant what he said before. He was falling in love with this man, perhaps for this very reason, because he was more than Sonny could handle. He'd never lied to him before and couldn't lie to him now. "No," he admitted honestly. "Never."

The hand never stopped its assault, never slowed its incredible, invasion action. Castillo shifted his weight, as the cop beneath him tried not to realize what that presaged. "Relax, Sonny," Marty's raspy voice warned. "Breathe evenly, slowly. Don't move."

No, no, no, no! Crockett's inner voice begged, but he kept it inside, ashamed of his fear, knowing that it was only his fragile masculinity shrieking it's last protest. He kept flashing back to all the past lovers he'd coached through this moment himself -- every one of them eventually hit this instant, the last protest, the final denial. And each one of them had learned that their change of heart came too late, as their fear of possession was finally recognized in this telling moment --even as he was learning it now, he, who had been the teacher for so long. And like all of them, he discovered the most frightening thing was that his body had its own agenda. As it sensed the impending initiation, it shivered uncontrollably in want and need.

Crockett shut his eyes and swallowed, but couldn't stop Burnett from having his last say. "Have a good time, pal. But just remember. You gotta sleep sometime."

Castillo actually laughed, then, a low dark chuckle that rattled Sonny as much as anything that had happened so far.

Then the conical glans slid against his perineum just as the punishing, seductive hand finally slipped out of him. But before he could tighten around the now empty space, the tip of Castillo's manhood assumed its place. Sonny tried to jerk away, but the Hispanic still held his raging cock in a punishing grip and used it to hold him in position.

"Hold still," Castillo warned placidly, as if giving him routine instructions for a new assignment.

"Marty, don't," Sonny babbled, finally unable to stop himself, "don't!" But the words sounded like the hollow echo of too many voices that had uttered those same words to him, words he had always cheerfully ignored.

"Shhhh," Castillo soothed, then murmured, "now push."

The green eyes widened as he heard the identical command he himself had give to so many men and women he'd inaugurated into this same rite. *What goes around comes around,* Burnett told him ominously. *You're on your own, pal!*

Martin entered him slowly, carefully, a millimeter at a time. Sonny tried breathing, relaxing, and pushing, but nothing helped. There was only this scary intimacy and the most soul-rattling pain he'd ever known.

"My god, my god," he prayed, but his only answer was Martin's soft sigh, as he pulled back slightly then entered again. Sonny spread his legs wide and panted desperately, but all there was in his world was Martin's flesh inside him, taking him.

He'd thought Castillo's fingers had opened him, but that was nothing compared to this.

The Latin reached down with his free hand and slipped it behind Sonny's knee, pulling it up towards his stomach. As soon as he did, the entire glans slipped inside. The sensation was phenomenal, a possession so total, Crockett couldn't breathe, couldn't think. It was happening, happening to *him;* he was being fucked by another man and he was helpless to stop it.

Sonny's body had a sudden change of heart and did everything it could to reject the invader, clamping down so hard, every muscle in his body tightened in protest. It was agonizing, and not only to him. Castillo gasped and stopped moving.

"*Ah, Dios,*" the Cuban swore softly, "stop fighting me, *querido.*"

Sonny shook his head, wondering why Marty thought he had any control over this. Castillo was in command here, the only one with any power over this situation. *My lieutenant is inside me. Inside me. Fucking me. Fucking....* He shuddered violently and swallowed a whimper.

"Accept it, my love," the Hispanic begged. "Accept *me.* Let me inside, because I love you. I've wanted you for so long."

"This is a helluva time," Sonny gasped angrily, "to come up with pillow talk!"

"It's the truth," Castillo insisted. "If I could do this casually, would I have waited seven years? Before you, there was only Jack. After you -- there will be no other. I love you, Sonny." The words were whispered huskily into Crockett's ear, the Latino's warm breath blowing against the shell.

To his amazement, the odd confession eased something inside him, and Crockett's body suddenly relaxed, releasing its death grip on Castillo's flesh. When it did, the Cuban exhaled in a rush, then once again began his entry.

"You mean that?" Sonny insisted, as Castillo's cock probed deeper inside him, pulling out, then pushing back in slow, careful increments. *Taking me. Fucking me. My lieutenant.* He trembled, and had to swallow to find his voice. "You really mean that, Marty?"

Castillo kissed his ear, his neck, his back, the moustached lips soft and surprisingly gentle. "*Si, amante, te amo, te amo.* Believe me, Sonny. I love you."

As though that changed everything, Crockett groaned throatily and yielded, letting Castillo have him. As Martin's heavy shaft buried itself completely between the beautiful tanned buttocks, Sonny finally understood what this was all about. The two lay joined together for a moment, neither moving, as the Floridian rasped, "Claiming ownership, *jefe*?"

"*Completamente,*" Castillo assured him.

"Go on then, take it," Crockett told him, accepting his role, letting himself admit to the pleasure racking his body. "It's yours. Do it. Fuck me. You own me now."

"For tonight? That's renting."

Sonny shut his eyes. What more did he want?

"Say it," Castillo ordered. "But only if it's the truth."

The cop lay trembling under the dangerous man, held captive by his body and his heavy manhood. *Getting fucked. Thoroughly, totally fucked. And loving it. Loving it like nothing else I've ever had, nothing else I've ever felt. Loving the possession, the loss of self. Loving being under him, knowing I'm his only bitch, his own sweet slut. Tell him. Tell how good it is. How much I love it. How much I love him. How could I do this otherwise? How else could I love it?*

But if he said the truth now he'd never be able to deny it again. He swallowed, then finally whispered. "I love you, Marty, I swear it's true."

Castillo sighed, as if a great weight had been removed from him. "I believe you, *querido.*" He buried a hand in Sonny's hair and pulled his head back to attack his ear savagely with teeth and tongue, then promised, "This is my mark on you -- my body inside you -- a mark only you and I can see. This first time -- and every time after. You're *mine.* Only mine. And we both know it."

Even as the rough, husky words raised goose bumps all along the Vice detective's skin, Castillo began to move with a slow, smooth, graceful stroke that lit Sonny up

from inside. He was filled, completed, possessed, absorbed in Martin's profound need, and it was a brand new experience for the cop. There was still pain, a terrifying unique agony, but soon, with the Latin's deliberate, sensuous motions, the pain eased and pleasure began, a terrible dark pleasure that tore at Crockett's soul, addicting him to his new lover. His only lover now. Yet he knew that inside Castillo the storm was still brewing, that this was just the edge of the squall.

He shook violently as Martin fucked him. The lieutenant kissed his back tenderly, tongued his ear, nipped his neck, trying to please him, trying to help him relax. And it was all wonderful, and frightening, and ultimately too much to endure. Marty still had Sonny's cock wrapped tight in his grip, stroking and toying with the swollen hard-on, but the pressure of their combined weight laying across that strong hand, combined with Marty's body pressing down from above, was too uncomfortable. Crockett tugged at Castillo's wrist, shaking his head, trying to make him understand. Reluctantly, his lover released him.

"Just this," Sonny gasped. "Just let me deal with this. I can't cope with anything else." *Not ever. Not ever again.*

With his freed hand Castillo captured one of Sonny's, entwining his fingers with the Anglo's. Crockett grasped that hand as if it might save him and crushed it in his grip. Still, Martin moved in and out of him, as if it were something they'd done a thousand times, plowing his hole open, turning his ass into a nest of raw nerve endings, a mass of hot, swollen tissue that was tortured into loving its fate.

He's marking me. Marking me. Making me his. Owning me. This first time -- and every time after. Every time. Every time. And I love it -- but he knows that. Sonny was losing it completely, being battered beyond his imagination, yet so excited it was everything he could do not to come in the sheets. He felt used, abused, violated, and so incredibly hot he couldn't stand it.

With his other hand, Castillo guided Sonny carefully up onto his knees and that position afforded the blond a little more comfort. Martin purred encouragement in short, strained phrases, telling Sonny how wonderful he was, how tight, how sweet, as he moved him into the position he wanted. The blond had a moment's panic as he anticipated being forced upright, and made to kneel erect -- which was *his* favorite position when he was on the other end. He couldn't handle being the receiver and prayed Marty wouldn't do that. But the Hispanic seemed to settle into the stroke he was using now, and kept Sonny on all fours, offering him this small bit of relief. Crockett found himself absurdly grateful, knowing there'd be nothing he could do to stop Marty from doing anything he wanted. He'd jump through hoops if his lieutenant wanted, walk through fire -- *be his bitch tonight and every night. Every time.*

"Yours," he whispered to himself, trying to stop himself from saying more, "yours. Yours."

The cop was wide open now, his ass a hot, slick, tight tunnel, built for nothing but pleasing Marty's cock, his body the most willing of victims. But inside his heart, Burnett watched and churned, planning revenge.

Then Castillo shifted his weight slightly and his next slide in *hit* something deep inside Crockett's body. The Anglo cried out, gasping, and tried to lurch away, the sensation too intense to endure.

"There it is," Castillo murmured as he withdrew and moved back again deliberately into the same place.

The shock made Sonny's brain reel as that exotic sensation ripped through him. It was like an electric prod hitting his balls, shocking his spine. His cock waved and danced, growing even harder till it hurt. He knew what it was, he'd looked for it in enough of his own lovers to figure it out. Marty had found his prostate. He couldn't take much of that, he knew. He'd lose the little bit of control he was desperately clinging to; he couldn't imagine what he might do, what he might say. Frantically, he tried to crawl out from under the Hispanic.

A hand dug into his shoulder and held him easily. "It's all right, *querido.* It'll feel good. I want you to enjoy this."

"If you'd wanted *that,*" Burnett spat, "you woulda got the fuck off me half an hour ago!"

Marty just laughed that soft, quiet laugh, and hit his prostate again.

"*Shit!* Dammit, don't do that!" the detective swore as the pleasure ripped through him, shattering him, dissolving him.

"Why not? So you can just lay there in anger and outrage? Give in. Let me love you, my way. Enjoy the pleasure I can give you. Tonight and all the nights in our future."

It hit again and Sonny's eyes rolled up. He didn't want to think about the future. He didn't want to think about himself, face down on this mattress night after night getting plowed by Castillo. He didn't want to think about how much he could learn to love it, how much he could look forward to it. He didn't want to think about how much he might have to adjust his image to accommodate this new reality.

Did you think it would be easy being Castillo's bitch? Burnett sneered. *He owns you now, lock, stock, and asshole.*

The next touch hit his groin like fireworks and he held onto his sanity with the last vestiges of his control.

"Give in, *querido.* Ride it out. Find out how much you can take," Castillo challenged.

It finally occurred to Sonny that Martin would never yield to his own needs until he was sure Sonny was getting his. At the rate they were going, Crockett would end up getting fucked all damn night. And *that* was something he knew he couldn't endure.

There's only one way outta this now, Burnett told him coldly. *If you listen to me this time, you might get something outta this, besides a new cunt.*

Okay, okay, Sonny agreed in desperation, just as the next stroke hit home. Stars glittered in his vision and his consciousness wavered.

"*Querido,*" Castillo whispered throatily, clutching Sonny's hips, "*querido.* Give in, please."

Sonny nodded, terrified, excited, and as hot as he'd ever been. "You win. You win. Just remember -- be careful of what you want-- "

Castillo probed deep, hitting his prostate with so much intensity Sonny yelped and nearly came. He shut his eyes, and hung on, feeling Marty coil behind him like a snake. The stroke hit him again, again, again, forcing so much pleasure on him, he really did lose it, sagging helplessly under the man, his body going boneless, collapsing onto the bed. Castillo never lost his place, his hips on automatic pilot. Sonny heard a voice, very much like his own, moaning and crying Martin's name, promising anything, offering everything.

Always yours, Marty, always yours, your mark on me. Your bitch, yours alone. You gotta stop, please, stop, baby. Gotta stop. You can't, you can't, dammit, baby, don't --

Four strokes later he came convulsively into the sheets, shuddering and bucking, saying things that no longer made sense even to him. Castillo tensed all over as Crockett jerked beneath him, tightening spasmodically, and Sonny knew the storm clouds had finally burst. "Marty, please, please," he muttered, but he no longer knew what he was begging for.

Then the typhoon hit.

Castillo's carefully crafted control crumbled in the face of Crockett's quivering release. He sat back on his knees, relieving Sonny of carrying his weight, and began pulling the cop onto his shaft, over and over. Crockett pulled himself back up on his knees, his legs spread wide, hanging on desperately as Marty finally gave in to his passion.

Seven years, Crockett kept thinking as Castillo shoved into him, again and again. *Seven **celibate** years. Man, I can pick 'em.*

He could hear Martin sucking air like a bellows as he fucked Sonny, on and on into the night. Within minutes of Crockett's ejaculation, the blond was hard again and aching, but he doubted if Castillo was even dimly aware. The man was lost in long-denied pleasure and the sweetness of Sonny's body.

He's taking what's his. What he owns.

Crockett closed his eyes and struggled just to handle it. Then, while Sonny hovered on the edge of his endurance, Marty sudden-

ly went rigid behind him. The organ ravaging him, amazingly, swelled even larger.

Sonny shouted, this new sensation more than he could stand. Castillo lay back over him again, pushing him down hard into the mattress. He dug a hand roughly in Crockett's hair and pulled his head back, while the other squeezed Sonny's hand.

"Burnett?" Marty gasped in Sonny's ear. "Can he take it?"

"Little late to worry about that," Sonny told him, his voice shattered.

"And you?"

"Not at all," the blond assured him. "You ever gonna come tonight, or is it just too damned good to ya?"

Another light laugh, then, "*Querido.* I love you." Tightening his grip on Sonny's hand, Martin kissed the side of his face.

"And I love you, you bastard," Sonny swore. "I love you so damn much, I don't even understand it."

Marty moaned, and pumped deep into his lover's ass, once, twice, three times, then came explosively, groaning low in his throat.

The cop gasped, feeling as though he were being filled by hot liquid, his hypersensitive tissues registering every pulse of fluid. As Castillo's organ pumped semen deep inside him, Sonny was shocked at what an intensely sexual feeling it was. "Damn, baby, damn!" he swore, his own cock twitching with renewed need.

Castillo sighed heavily and finally stopped moving, so the two just lay together quietly, Martin blanketing Sonny's body, his erection still up, still tightly wedged in Crockett's body. The blond, still quivering from sensory overload, was afraid to move, afraid he might discover that, like some men -- like Sonny himself -- the Cuban might be good for more than one of those a night -- something the Southerner knew he couldn't face. He wasn't sure he could handle what had just happened, never mind a repeat! He didn't even want to think too much about it and searched his shattered mind for some other topic to distract himself.

"Marty?" he murmured, trying to catch his breath. The lieutenant didn't answer, just kissed his neck gently to indicate his attention. Sonny was determined not to think about the heavy cock still buried in his brutalized rectum, what that swollen, throbbing flesh might still be capable of. "What was the story with you and Gretsky anyway?"

Castillo tensed slightly, but didn't move, didn't respond.

"Come on, man," Sonny insisted. "You owe me some answers. What was going on with you two? I figured you had to be lovers, but for how long? How did May Ying fit in? What broke you two up?"

"Why are you asking me this?" Castillo asked softly. He shifted ever so slightly and Sonny had to bite his lip savagely to keep from crying out. Lights spangled behind his eyes.

Sonny would've turned to glare at the man if he dared move. "Because the existence of May Ying and Jack Gretsky were what made me start thinking of you as a human being. Someone I could care about. Worry about. Maybe even love. You say you love me, made me confess the same. So, give me something, man."

There was an uncomfortable silence for awhile until Sonny felt compelled to fill it. "Maybe I just have trouble seeing you and Gretsky like this. That dude was a professional assassin. It's hard to imagine you lovin' someone like that. Hard to imagine someone like that... playin' bottom for anyone -- even you." Sonny tried to imagine Gretsky wearing Martin's mark and couldn't.

"Jack wasn't always an assassin," Castillo offered. "That came later."

"After... you two broke up?"

"Just before," Castillo admitted. "He knew how I felt about it. He did it anyway. He was good at it. Too good. I couldn't accept it, so...."

Sonny nodded.

"Later, I met May Ying," the Cuban offered, simply.

What a difference, Crockett thought. No fear that she'd turn into a paid assassin. "Gretsky. That was one bad boy, Marty. Still hard for me to see you two like this."

"Our relationship... was mutual," Martin told him.

"Uh-huh," Sonny grunted, mulling that over. As he'd hoped, bringing up the late Jack Gretsky distracted Castillo enough that

he began to lose his erection, and his mood. Carefully, he eased out of Sonny's ass, and the shock of his leaving almost made the blond cry out, but he suppressed it.

When he found his voice, asked, "Mutual, huh? That mean you let *him* in?"

Castillo hesitated as he slid off Crockett's back, gazing at his lover as if considering what he was really asking. His eyes were heavy lidded, and Sonny wondered if the Cuban was finally feeling the wonderful, sleepy lassitude that Sonny had enjoyed earlier.

But before he could find out, Castillo left the bed without answering his question and padded quietly to the head. By the sounds emanating from there, he figured Marty was washing up, and when he returned to the bed smelling of Sonny's soap, that confirmed it. As Crockett eased himself out of his own wet spot, the darker man held something small in his hand and leaned over his lover's prone form.

Before Sonny could push him on the topic again, Martin pressed a cool washcloth against the blond's swollen tissues. Crockett hissed in surprise, and stared at his lover. Castillo ignored his questioning gaze, and continued applying the cold cloth with his typical professional detachment. Finally, he removed it, carefully dried Sonny's skin, then returned everything.

Crockett just shook his head in confusion as Marty made his way back. *The guy tries to fuck me into next week, won't answer a simple question about his past, then nursemaid's my ass as gently as Florence Nightingale. Go figure.*

Marty settled back on the bed, turning onto his stomach, head pillowed on his arms, and watched his subordinate with a sly expression. "Don't worry about Jack, Sonny. Just worry about us."

"That's exactly what I am worried about, lover," Sonny insisted. "Just that exactly."

The Anglo gingerly rolled onto his side. *Well, nothing's fallen out so far,* he thought, relieved, as he shifted uncomfortably. The cool cloth had definitely improved things down there. He moved closer to the Latin, running a hand lazily up and down his spine. "So -- how was it? Okay, for the first time?" Crockett tried to imagine what it must've felt like to break such a long stretch of celibacy.

Castillo's nearest hand moved to Sonny's face, petting his cheek, then stroking his hair. His expression softened, his black eyes almost sorrowful. "It was wonderful for me, *querido.* It'll get easier each time between us, and there'll be more pleasure for you. I promise."

Sonny swallowed, hearing everything that promise meant. He wasn't at all sure he could handle any more pleasure like that -- never mind a steady regimen of being Marty's bottom. *Just like at work, he's got this whole thing planned out. And my place is totally secure in his mind.*

But, of course, things at work didn't always go the way Marty planned.

Crockett kept running his fingers lightly over the ridges running down his lover's back. "Yeah, and we know you're a man of your word, now, don't we?" the detective remarked. "How come that idea makes me so *nervous*?"

The lieutenant gave that funny half-snort that was his form of laughter. His eyes traveled the length of Sonny's body, pausing for a moment to study Crockett's eager erection, then returning to study the green eyes watching him. His lids blinked heavily.

The Vice cop couldn't help but smile as he slowed down the fingertip massage even more. "Sleepy, Marty?"

Castillo's eyes opened again. "Mmmmm. A little." He seemed amused. "Very relaxed."

Crockett grinned. "That's good. Real good. A little sleepy. Very relaxed. That's good, Marty." Sonny mused that this might be the closest to malleable his lieutenant might ever be. Cautiously, as if approaching a dangerous animal, he hugged the darker man with one arm, pulling himself half onto Martin's back. Kissing his neck gently, he slung a leg over Castillo's. His erection brushed the lieutenant's hip.

"But you're not sleepy," the Cuban remarked knowingly. His eyes, clear and dark, gazed unblinkingly at his lover.

"Nope. Not me. Not sleepy at all, pal," he confessed cheerily, laying a path of gentle kisses over Marty's shoulders and spine. His

leg insinuated itself between the Latino's, his thigh rubbing lazily between its companions. "But you're sleepy. That's good. Be sleepy. Be relaxed. That's real good."

Castillo shifted slightly, and Sonny held perfectly still, suspecting that the martial arts expert beneath him could undoubtedly throw him off and have him back on his face in half a heartbeat. And if that loosed the storm again -- Sonny didn't think he could survive another bout with Castillo riding his back tonight.

But Burnett wouldn't let him give up.

Sonny slid a hand up and buried it in Martin's thick hair, pulling his head back gently. He licked the shell of Martin's ear slowly, wickedly, until he could feel a flush of goose bumps rising over the golden skin.

"Tell me more about Jack, Marty," he whispered huskily. "Tell me about your *mutual* relationship. I like the way that sounds."

"Sonny," Castillo grumbled. It was clearly a warning.

"Almost sounds like that two way street I was tellin' you about earlier," Crockett reminded him. "Remember that, Marty? I said, 'either *we* make love, or *we* don't?'" His tongue bathed the ear seductively, and his heart quickened as the Cuban leaned into it.

"We made love, *querido,*" Castillo insisted. "You gave me your gift twice, as I gave you mine." He sighed as Sonny nipped his lobe.

"True, very true," Sonny admitted, amused by Marty's colloquial phrasing. One of his hands traveled over Castillo's side, down his flank, then slowly stroked the tight, flat buttock still exposed. Marty tensed under his palm, and it made him smile. "But, uh... that was me, Marty, those two times. Burnett hasn't had his yet."

He heard Castillo's odd half-laugh again.

"Didn't forget about Burnett, did you?" Sonny asked. "I mean, you *told* me to let *you* handle Burnett." He slid completely onto his lover's back, nudging the Cuban's legs apart with his own. Brazenly, he nestled his hard-on between Martin's cheeks. "Well, pal, he's ready to be handled *now.*"

Castillo shook his head slightly, and tensed. Crockett knew how much strength Marty packed into that small, lithe body. But the darker man was tired. He had been celibate for all these past years, while Sonny was used to working the sleaze balls half the night, balling away the other half, then having to be on time for work the next morning.

So, when Castillo started to lift them both up off the mattress, he was just slow enough to telegraph his move. As the Hispanic shifted -- probably preparing to toss Crockett off -- Sonny grabbed Marty's supporting arm right at the elbow and yanked it back hard and quick, forcing the arm to fold. Martin's face collapsed rudely onto his pillow as Crockett's hand slid quickly down Castillo's arm to his wrist, then yanked the arm up and over Marty's back in a classic cop hold. Castillo grunted in surprise.

"Easy there, pal, easy," Sonny warned, his own heart trip-hammering like crazy. Man, this was gonna piss Castillo off royally. "You gotta forgive me, here, Marty. I mean, you've got a major advantage over me with all that kung-fu shit you like to use on the unsuspecting. Me, I'm just your average street fighter. I know you can take me three outta three, so I knew I had to get the drop on you first."

Castillo coiled under him, every muscle bunching tight. He tried to shift, forcing Crockett to move the arm up just another fraction, freezing the man in place.

Sonny swallowed. If Marty threw him now, it was gonna be *all* night, Maryanne! "Listen, man, it's not like I *want* to do this this way. But, hey, you've gone and made the assumption that you're the only dangerous dude in this bed. And that really pisses Burnett off. Cause he thinks he's the baddest dude that ever was. And he doesn't like being considered less than *any* former lover."

Castillo tried to glance back at Sonny. "Not less. Never, less."

Crockett shook his head. "Then, maybe you'd like to define the word 'mutual' for me. You and Gretsky had a 'mutual' relationship. And you and me -- ?"

The Latin grew still under the detective.

"Uh-huh," Sonny mused. "Okay, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. I'll *assume* you haven't had the time to think this all the way through."

"And you have?" Castillo asked, his voice strained.

"Oh, I had *this* part planned a month ago. It was that *other* action you surprised me with that wasn't on the agenda. Don't tell me you've already forgotten all those questions you asked me just a few minutes ago -- the questions you asked to reassure yourself. How many lovers had I had in this position? How many *escaped*? You knew the answer to that without askin', didn't you? Did you really think you would be the first?"

Castillo tensed under him, but remained silent.

Sonny had to laugh. "Oh, so you *did* think you'd be the first. Well, Marty, even you can make an error in judgment. Or did you think the terms *subordinate* and *submissive* were synonyms?"

He leaned down to kiss Castillo's spine, and the lieutenant chose that moment to shift his weight and buck. Crockett lurched, but held on to his lover's arm. His loss of balance caused him to yank the arm cruelly and Castillo grimaced. It was the only thing that saved him from being tossed onto his face.

The blond almost apologized for hurting the Latino, then remembered Marty growling at him once to never apologize to an opponent. His lieutenant would see it as a sign of weakness if he did -- and that was the one thing he couldn't afford now.

"This can go hard," Crockett murmured in the nearest brown ear, "or it can go easy. Don't matter to me, pal."

Castillo's black eyes glittered darkly as he captured Sonny's gaze. "Burnett wouldn't like it easy, would he?"

"Not half as much," Sonny admitted honestly, his voice low.

"And I'm not getting out of here without dealing with this, am I?" Castillo asked, an edge of humor in his voice.

"Nope," Sonny assured him happily. "Not a chance."

The Latin hunched his shoulders as if to relieve the tension in the captive arm.

"No, you don't," Crockett growled, tugging at the imprisoned limb. He lay his weight heavily over the smaller body. "You're takin' too much time to think about this, and no one has to tell me that your brain is *your* most dangerous weapon. You need to be distracted."

Keeping a tight grip on Castillo's twisted arm with his left hand, he leaned down and nuzzled his lover's ear as seductively as he could. As if he couldn't help himself, Martin leaned into it, sighing, but Sonny didn't drop his guard. "What kind of magic charm did Gretsky have that I don't, huh?" he murmured. "What, was his dick made of gold, or did you decide that you'd made a mistake with him -- one you would never repeat again?"

The body beneath him went rigid all over and Sonny chuckled evilly.

"I should've know," Crockett purred. "You definitely look like the 'never-again' type. Well, 'never' is a long, long time, darlin'."

Again, he licked at the dark ear near his mouth and waited until Martin responded, but this time Castillo seemed apathetic to his touch.

"So, how did Gretsky manage it, huh? He use drugs, force, handcuffs, what? Or was it you, your feelings? Because you really *loved* him? So, I guess all that rap you handed me was just the old 'get-over.' All us good undercover cops know how to play that game -- say what you have to to get what you need. That it, Marty?"

Castillo shook his head with an effort. "I meant it when I said I love you. That was the truth."

"So, maybe you just don't love me the *same way*, or what?" Castillo's reticence was really starting to get on his nerves.

"Stop analyzing me," Castillo ordered brusquely. "Just do it and get it over with."

The words chilled Sonny's blood. "Boy, you really know me, don't'cha? I gotta tell ya, baby, Burnett's a whole lot of things -- none of them good -- but the one thing he's not is a rapist." He released Martin's arm and helped him straighten it out, then rubbed the muscles in it to soothe the ache.

Castillo's expression seemed oddly regretful. When the lieutenant didn't move, just kept watching him, Sonny kept his place on the Hispanic's back, running his hands over both arms comfortingly, kissing his lover's shoulders gently.

"Sonny," Marty finally whispered, "I didn't mean that."

"Okay," Crockett conceded, still stroking the strong arms, his lips drawing light, tender patterns over Martin's spine. He felt Castillo's body relax subtly. "Maybe I said some things I shouldn't have. I'm not used to being jealous of a dead man."

Castillo looked back at him. "Don't be jealous, *querido.* Jack and I -- our relationship wasn't easy. It's just -- I'm a different man now than I was then. It's been so long. I'm used to being in control. Used to being alone. Used to being cautious. It's hard to remember... how to trust. How to yield."

Sonny felt a pang as Castillo made his second confession of the night. Maybe it was time for the games to end. "Then, don't remember. Let's make it all new again. It was the first time for me, and I survived. Put the past away, Marty. I'm your future now."

Castillo sighed heavily, as though Sonny had just shown him a surprising truth.

"I love you, Marty," Sonny reminded him. "Why do you think I want you so much?"

Castillo half turned and stared at the blond over his shoulder, but his expression wasn't disbelieving. Instead, it was hopeful. He reached a hand out, and stroked Sonny's cheek tenderly. "It's been a long time since I've even considered my future. For so many years, for me, there's been nothing but my bitter, broken past."

The blond cop leaned down and kissed the Latin chastely. "Put it away, Marty. Don't look back anymore. We're goin' forward, man. You and me."

They kissed again, with more urgency this time, and Castillo murmured, "Teach me to love, *querido.* Make it new again." Then he lay back down on his chest, pillowing his head on his arms.

His lieutenant's sudden compliance aroused Sonny more than anything that had happened tonight. A dozen methods of seduction went through his mind in a heartbeat, but he put all those old memories behind. Marty wasn't like anyone else, he was different, special. And Sonny wanted this to be all new and special for him. For this man, he was willing to do things he'd never even considered with anyone else.

He went back to kissing the brown-skinned back, running his lips gently over the column of Castillo's neck, then his spine, his shoulder blades. Martin moved with the gentle attention, rolling against it, encouraging him. Sonny could feel a flush of goose bumps travel down the man's spinal ridge and smiled. He traced every single vertebrae with the tip of his tongue and rejoiced when Castillo began to sigh and relax under his mouth. Softly, he kissed the lean flanks, even as he ran his hands over the taut swells of Martin's buttocks. Castillo twitched, then relaxed again, but Sonny could see him clutching his pillow like a life preserver. That's okay, he had time, all the time in the world.

He laved the skin over the small of Martin's back, admiring its sculptured beauty, then pressed his lips suggestively at the very top of the muscled rump. Castillo didn't quite succeed in suppressing his gasp. Sonny's lips moved slowly, suggestively, over each buttock, kissing, lightly nipping, licking, until finally Castillo started to quiver. Glancing up, Crockett realized that his lover was watching him, mesmerized by his performance.

He returned the gaze and smiled. Then licking his lips murmured huskily, "This is for you alone, baby. Only you."

Moving between Castillo's parted legs, Sonny placed one hand on each of his partner's cheeks, then spread them. Lowering his head, he pressed his wet tongue against the very top of the cleft and began to slowly lick his way down the dark, moist crevasse.

The Cuban gasped half in surprise, half in outrage, and lurched hard, but Sonny just held on, his mouth, his tongue, moving, stroking, lapping at the hidden place inch by inch. Martin's masculine musk filled his nose, his mouth. He inhaled it like the finest

perfume, as though he needed to memorize the tantalizing scent.

"Dios, .no!" Castillo rasped in protest, squirming.

But Sonny ignored him as he discovered the wonderful intimacy of this new act. Knowing what it felt like to receive it, he hoped he was delighting Martin as much as others had delighted him in the past. His tongue moved lower, lower, so slowly he knew it had to be torturing the darker man, and that's exactly what he wanted. When finally, his wet tongue located the taut puckered opening, Castillo gave a strangled cry. That's when Sonny really went to work. He lapped, he probed, he licked, and when it became too much for the Hispanic and he tried to crawl away, Crockett stopped just long enough to lay a punishing bite on one buttock to remind his lover just who was in charge now.

The Latin got the message and flattened on the bed, yielding with a tortured moan. As Sonny felt the Cuban melting into the linens -- the lean body relaxing more and more under the torturing tongue, Marty's breath coming in short gasps -- he felt so much joy, he thought his heart would burst. Martin was splayed before him, so vulnerable now Crockett could barely believe it.

Was he ready for him, ready for this? The blond was afraid to let himself think too far ahead.

Then Castillo gasped, *"Querido,* please--!" as his hands clutched the pillow in a death grip.

Groping quietly with his right hand, Crockett managed to find the lubricant, and collected some. "Ssssh," Crockett soothed, even as Castillo had comforted him. "You told me this could be fun with the right attitude, didn't you? I'm beginning to see your point." He went back to laving Castillo's ass, slowly, wickedly, waiting until Martin writhed under his mouth, hot and needy.

Then, and only then, did he let his hand take his tongue's place.

A small sound escaped the lieutenant as Crockett's fingers found his mark. Martin's body locked down tight as Sonny toyed with his target, trying to coerce it into compliance. As he did, he moved up the lean spine, kissing his way back to his lover's neck.

Castillo shuddered under his assault, his buttocks flexing tightly around the hand toying with his sphincter. Crockett expected some rebellion at the moment of truth and wanted to be prepared.

"I love you, baby," he whispered huskily as he teased the reluctant organ. He was aching for this man, his own body shaking with need as though he hadn't already come twice tonight. But not this way. Not inside. He trembled with hunger, knowing if he didn't do this soon, he'd lose it and be too rough.

He pressed a gentle fingertip against the tight anus and rolled it around the locked door, as though he could sneak up on it. "I love you, Marty. I need you. I'm so hungry for you I can barely stand it. Was this what it was like for you? Did you need it so bad you hurt inside?"

Castillo's bottomless black eyes captured his green ones and he nodded.

"You gotta give this to me, baby," Sonny insisted. "Give it to me because you want it, too. I need you to want me."

Castillo never blinked, never moved his gaze, then nodded again.

Sonny gasped and felt the Cuban's body relax under him. Cautiously, he slid the end of his finger inside Martin's body.

The Latin felt as hot as a furnace and his throaty groan vibrated right up Sonny's arm. Crockett gasped as if he was the one being violated, then moved his hand carefully, trying to open his lover. His own anus throbbed in remembrance, and that made him even hotter. He could see Castillo trying to force his body to cooperate, but he was only have marginal success.

Crockett probed gently, moving his finger in and out, trying to make his actions seductive, not rough. Marty was gasping, panting, writhing under his hand, his control shattering. It was the most exciting thing Crockett had ever witnessed. Moistening his lips, Sonny slid a second finger in. Castillo moaned softly, a sound so full of sexual need, it made Crockett shudder, and his own rectum twitched and flexed in sympathy. *Now it's your turn to be mine. Mine. All mine.*

"Sonny, please!" Castillo gasped. "Do it now. Do it."

"You're not ready, baby, you're too tight," Crockett protested. "It'll hurt too much; I don't want that."

Castillo shook his head. "It won't get any easier this way. You're losing it, and so am I. Trust me this time. I need you now."

Sonny felt a lump as hard as granite form in his throat. It was his every fantasy come through -- Castillo pleading for him, wanting him inside. Martin was right, too, he *was* losing it. Swallowing hard, he reached for more lubricant, using it liberally on his aching, hungry flesh, then collected more to once again coat Castillo's orifice.

The Cuban shuddered violently under him and Sonny smiled knowingly. "The future's a scary place, isn't it?"

Castillo glanced back at him once, then looked away as if he couldn't bear the sight of himself being impaled. He shut his eyes and forced himself to breathe slowly, rhythmically. Sonny had to admire his ability to remember little details like that. All he'd wanted to do was escape. Martin was yielding, surrendering completely; it was one of the most seductive things Sonny had ever witnessed.

"I love you, baby," the detective whispered as he withdrew his hand and nestled his cockhead in its place. His throat choked up again, preventing him from repeating the phrase. Now, it was his turn to shudder as his most sensitive part pressed against his lover's dark, hidden mouth. It was as though he had never done this before, and that mad thought rattled him thoroughly. Swallowing, he pushed as gently as he could, entering the shockingly tight furnace of Castillo's body.

The heated tunnel kissed him back, then enveloped him almost easily. Then everything stopped. Martin's body clamped shut, trapping the swollen head of Sonny's cock inside. He watched the muscles in Marty's back ripple in protest, and the pressure around his manhood made lights float before his eyes.

"Keep breathing," Sonny gasped, holding perfectly still. He kissed Martin's neck, his ear, his shoulders. "Try and relax." It had been such a useless suggestion for him he felt like a hypocrite parroting it back. "I love you, baby. My god, how I love you."

The pressure only increased, making him feel as if the blood had been cut off to his glans. "Give it up!" he growled impatiently through his teeth. "Give it up to me. You're mine now, accept it. I love you, and you're mine. Now, let me in, dammit!"

Castillo exhaled in a rush, and suddenly his body opened, the spasm passing.

Sonny pressed his forehead against Marty's spine. "You okay?"

Castillo nodded, pressing a palm against the Southerner's flank.

Cautiously, Crockett moved, entering the hot channel, feeling it surround him bit by bit. He was sweating, rivulets pouring off him and he felt hollow inside and shaky from his previous orgasms. He wasn't even sure he had anything left to come with, but he didn't care. This was the culmination of all his fantasies and erotic dreams; it was hard to believe that it was actually *happening.*

Pressing his lips gently against Martin's back, he continued to enter his lover, loving every second of the tight intrusion as wave after wave of intense pleasure washed over him. Beneath him, Martin's chest heaved for air as he fought to accept the intimate assault. Finally, after long moments of some of the most incredible delight Sonny had ever experienced, he was completely inside, nestled tightly in the battered cavern, feeling Martin's body pulse around him, feeling the throbbing of his lover's heart through the sensitive flesh of his erection. It was exquisite, more wonderful than he could've dreamed. He held perfectly still for a moment and hugged the man to him.

"Baby, baby, it's so good inside you," he whispered raggedly, then finally began to move, to use the rhythm that came as natural to his body as breathing. As he felt his enraged flesh slide in and out of the powerful body beneath him, he marveled at what he was doing, and who he was doing it to.

It was so hard to believe, he had to push himself up on his arms just so he could look down and watch himself. And it was happening, it was really happening. Slowly, wonderfully, his cock kept penetrating

Castillo's ass, that beautiful brown ass that lay beneath him taking him in, sucking him in deeper and deeper into that incredibly tight, hot place. "Baby, baby, so good...." he whispered as he finally tore his eyes away from that exquisite sight and settled back over his lover.

His lover.

Martin Castillo.

His lover that he was fucking here in his bed. His. Completely his. Splayed beneath him in an act of submission so intimate, so wonderful, that the import of it made him dizzy.

Sonny couldn't tally how many lovers he'd had in his life, and Marty knew that. But tonight Crockett learned that the man giving him this gift, this intense, profound gift, had shared it with very few indeed. He shuddered, and suddenly wished that he had been as selective, that he could've offered Marty that as well. Gently, with gratitude and humility, he kissed the back of Castillo's neck.

Martin's body was still tense, but more relaxed than before. When he moved his legs and drew up his knees to improve Sonny's position, the blond almost fell apart. Castillo was helping him now, moving with him, encouraging his thrusts, his slick, passionate invasion.

"Marty, oh damn! So good to me," Sonny moaned, as his arms surrounded the smaller body, hugging it tight against him. He wanted to crush the Latin, pound him into the mattress and fought against those feelings, fearing what would happen if he let himself go.

"*Querido,*" Castillo gasped suddenly, surprising him.

"Yeah?" Sonny replied.

"Give Burnett what he wants," Martin said softly. "You can't hold him back forever."

The cop's eyes widened in surprise. "No way. You're barely tolerating this. You know... how he can be." Crockett blinked, getting that odd schizzy feeling he always did when he talked about Burnett as if he were someone else, not just another side of his own self.

"If you don't give him what he wants now," Castillo insisted, "he'll show up when you're not prepared."

Sonny shook his head. "No. Don't talk about him. I don't want him here, now." This was the purest moment in Crockett's life. Burnett would.... Burnett could....

"Let me handle Burnett," Martin said again, for the second time this night.

Crockett had a sudden, surprising insight. *This has something to do with Gretsky,* he realized. Did Gretsky have a dark side, a Burnett of his own? Had it been Gretsky's Burnett that had turned him into a professional assassin? Could it be that Marty's refusal to deal with that side of Jack made his dark side the dominant?

He knew Castillo would never tell him. He also knew that Gretsky's reappearance and death had reopened all kinds of wounds for the Latin, wounds that had somehow allowed Sonny access to his heart.

He swallowed and murmured huskily, "I don't want to hurt you, baby."

"You can't hurt me, *querido,*" Castillo assured him. Suddenly, he tightened his body around Sonny's shaft, and that only inflamed the already incandescent desire blazing inside the younger cop. "Trust me, Sonny. Let him loose."

Sonny closed his eyes, suddenly afraid. "Sure hope you know what *we're* doing." He moved his mouth back to Castillo's ear, tongued it wetly, then captured the lobe between his teeth and held it threateningly.

Castillo clamped down around him again, and when he did Sonny bit down hard on the tender lobe. Martin's whole body tightened, his ass feeling like a velvet-lined vise and Crockett thrust in hard, deep. The Latin groaned.

Still holding the smaller man in his arms, Sonny rolled them onto their sides. His long, tanned legs wrapped around Castillo's and pulled them back, pinning them so that the Latin couldn't move. It changed their position enough to allow Crockett's next plunge to go even deeper into the willing body. Castillo gasped and tried to pull away, but couldn't.

"I told you before," Sonny reminded him saucily in the brutalized ear, "be careful of

what you want -- you just might get it." He kissed the juncture of Castillo's neck and shoulder then bit him again, deliberately, until he lurched. "Mmmm, nice," Burnett purred, running his tongue over the bruised place -- his own mark. "So nice. I like this position -- it lets me use my hands."

Crockett's heavy palms roved Castillo's chest, finding the hardened nubs of his nipples and toyed with them dangerously. Castillo's body tensed under the attention, but finally relaxed. As soon as he did, Crockett pinched the tender nipples, feeling Castillo tighten down hard around him, the delightful sensation sending rockets off in his brain.

The Latin tried to pull away, then buried his nails into one of Crockett's hips and cried out, "Sonny! Sonny!"

"You called up the devil, man, and now he's ready to play," the blond reminded him. "I tried to tell you."

Burying his teeth cruelly in the back of Martin's neck, Sonny heard him moan and felt him writhe under him. His struggles excited the cop wildly, and Crockett rode him hard. Sliding his hands down the lean chest and over the taut stomach, Crockett's fingers carded through dense, wiry curls in search of Castillo's semi-erect organ.

"I've danced with the devil before," Martin confirmed, his voice rough. "I know his name. I know his needs. Let me give this to you. Only you."

Sonny captured the semi-limp flesh and stroked with a surprising gentleness. His other hand slid under Martin's heavy sac and gathered the pendulous globes. The Latin hissed through his teeth and the sleepy cock nodded slightly.

"You *like* the dance," Burnett purred into a dark ear. "You love the struggle, the war. I think you even like to lose. Hmmm? Or maybe you've forgotten what that's like -- to just give it all up, give it over to someone else -- let someone overpower you, possess you, take you body and soul? Make you *their* bitch? Well, I'm gonna love teaching you, baby, all over again. Come on, lover, let's dance."

Without warning, Sonny rolled Castillo onto his stomach. Drawing his knees under them, Sonny used his grip on Castillo's organs as a lever to haul them both upright, into a kneeling position, Martin's back pressed tight to Crockett's chest. Marty clutched his wrists as Sonny manipulated his sensitive genitals. Crockett grinned as Castillo's cock hardened under his rough attention and his sac tightened up hard against his body.

Through it all, Sonny's cock stayed buried to the hilt in his lover's body. The position forced Castillo to sit down solidly on the violating rod. The two men were glued together by sweat and lubricant as Sonny humped up hard in a slow, steady rhythm he thought he could keep up all night. His own ass pulsed with every thrust as if reliving its own deflowering, and those sensations only added to electric thrill of this act. His hands continued to work Martin's sensitive flesh.

The lieutenant rested his dark head back on Sonny's shoulder, his face wearing an expression that mixed pain and pleasure so exquisitely it made the Anglo even more rigid.

"You've been here before," Burnett growled, jealousy raging irrationally through him. "In Gretsky's arms. Like this. Being his bitch. You're there now." His cock pounded mercilessly into his victim's body, punishing him for his imagined wantonness.

The black eyes stared back at him as Castillo shook his head. "Not like this. Never like this. It's all new, *querido.* Just like you said. There's only you. Making me yours."

Those words seemed to implode in Crockett's heart, filling him with a flood of emotions he couldn't sort out. He kissed the ravaged cheek, knowing what it had to cost this man of all men to yield to him this way -- so open, so willing. "Only mine. Mine. So good.... So sweet...."

Sonny felt Burnett receding, his harsh edges softening. And still Castillo stayed wrapped around him, sucking his cock with his tight, searing ass, one hand clutching Crockett's wrist, the other touching the blond's hip, riding the flexing muscles under it.

"Marty," Sonny gasped, kissing the damaged face, his ear, his neck, his shoulders, "be mine. Please, be mine.

Tonight. Always." He wasn't supposed to be the one begging, was he?

"Yes," Castillo gasped raggedly, tightening his grip on Crockett's wrist. "Yours. Tonight. And always."

He realized then the Cuban's shaft was fully erect in his hands, strong and upright. Sonny felt himself teetering on the edge, felt himself growing inside the tight channel. Both their bodies grew taut, coiled.

Sonny kissed the side of Castillo's face. "Give it to me, baby. All of it. Now."

Castillo squeezed his eyes shut tight and sighed. Sonny felt the organ in his hand jerk and pulse, felt a small stream of hot, viscous fluid leak over his stroking hand. It was the very last thing he needed. His own body tensed then something brittle and hard tore out of his soul. Then everything inside him seemed to pour out as his essence flowed into Castillo. And with that small amount of ejaculate went the last of his energy.

The two men collapsed as one on the bed, Sonny still astride the warm body of his lover. He knew he had to pull out, had to wash up, had to help Marty, but sleep was smothering him like a living thing, stealing his consciousness.

After a moment of trying to catch his breath, he felt Martin slide out cautiously from under him. Somehow, Castillo still had the where-with-all to make it into the head. He heard the shower running and decided he could nap for just a few minutes....

What felt like hours later, he heard his lieutenant calling his name. *It can't be time for work, it just can't!* he thought desperately.

"Sonny, come on. You need to shower. Then we can sleep."

Crockett blinked and looked over his shoulder. Castillo was still damp, all fresh smelling, his hair wet. He looked like he was ready to go dancing -- except that he was nude. Beads of water glistened like diamonds in the hard curls of his groin. How could he look so beautiful, so desirable -- so completely together? Sonny hated him.

"It'll take five minutes, and you'll feel better. Come on," Castillo encouraged.

"Feel better than this?" Crockett mused, his voice shattered. "I don't think so." Reluctantly, he dragged himself out of the comfort of his sheets and somehow made it to the head. After the shock of water beat over him, rinsing away the sweat, semen, and god-knows-what-else off his body, he grudgingly admitted he did feel better. He might even forgive Castillo for this after all.

Returning to the cabin, he slid back under the sheets, clean and presentable once more. Moving against Martin's back, he cuddled around him comfortably. "Love you, baby," he murmured, kissing his shoulder as if they'd been doing this for years.

"And I, you, *querido*," Castillo answered, surprisingly alert.

"You think next time we might not try to make up for all seven years in one night?" Crockett asked naughtily.

"Perhaps," Castillo answered coyly, and Sonny could almost feel the darker man smile in his embrace. But Martin's voice was heavy with fatigue, and with a final, heavy sigh, the slight body in the Vice cop's arms relaxed into sleep.

After his lieutenant -- and his lover -- slipped into a peaceful slumber, Crockett found himself lying awake for a long time. His mind churned with the memories of everything that had passed between them, even as he enjoyed this new sensation of sleeping with Martin. Yet underneath all his random, hodge-podge of thoughts and memories lay one other annoying worry -- just how was he ever going to get Rico to pay him that bottle of *Dom Perignon*?

'Cos they said thunder and they said lightning
It would never strike twice
Oh but if that's true, why can't you tell me
How come this feels so nice, Oh it feels alright

Thunder and Lightning -- Phil Collins

Flamingo would love to hear from anyone who loved - or hated - this story. Ideas can be exchanged, or other Flamingo stories obtained, by writing to Flamingo, PO Box 823, Beltsville, MD, 20705